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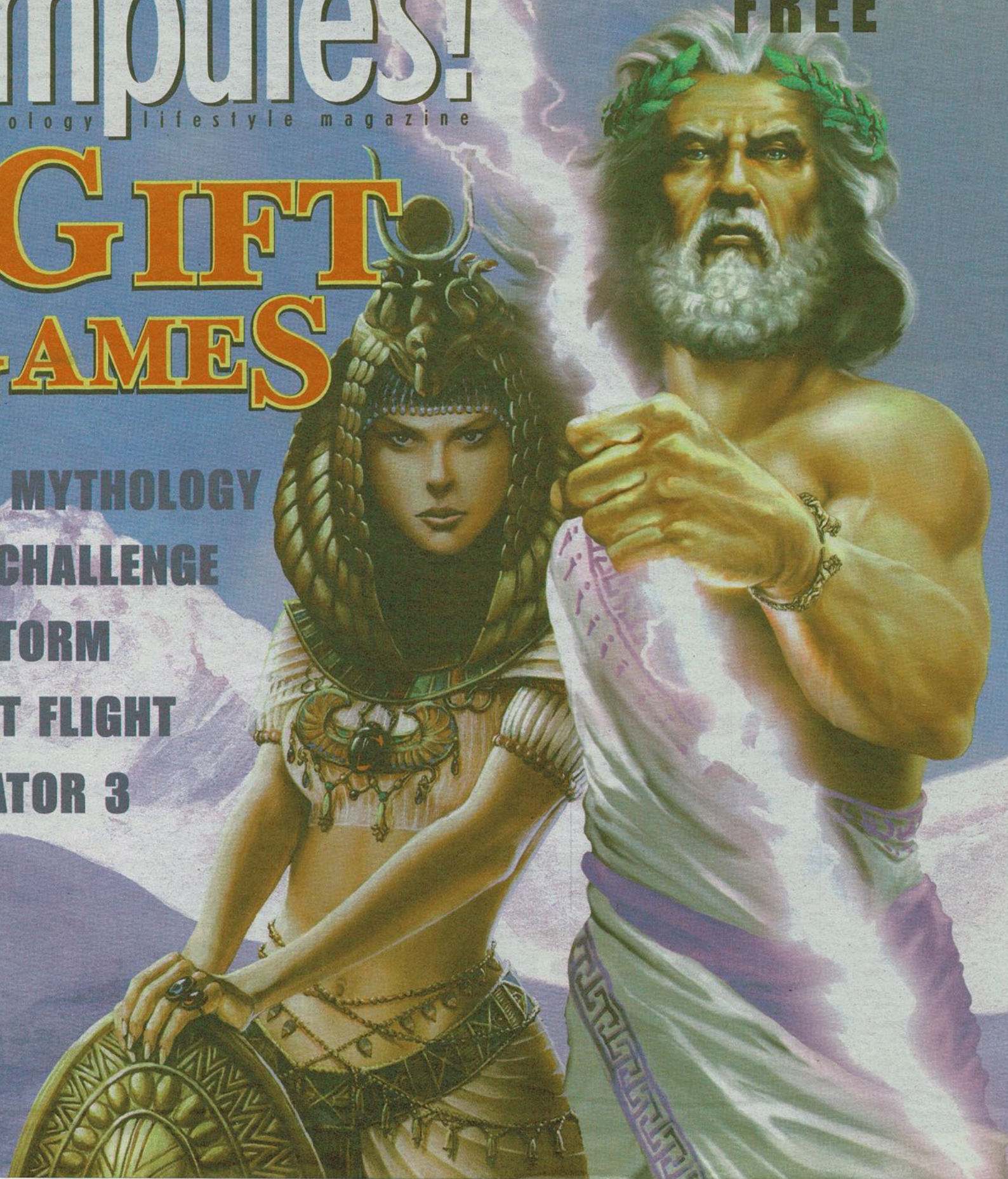
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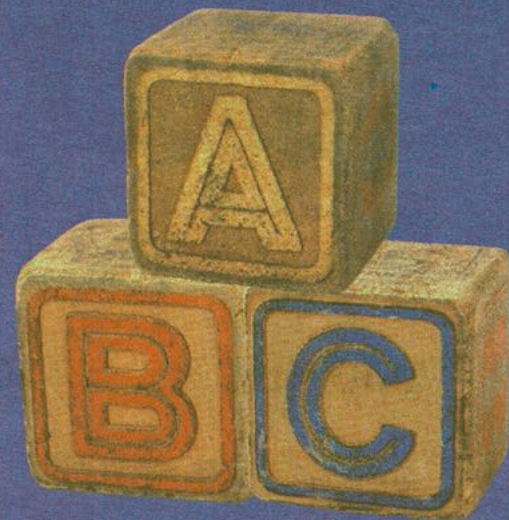
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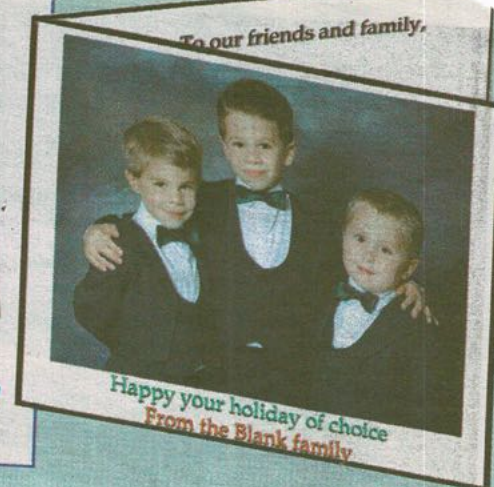
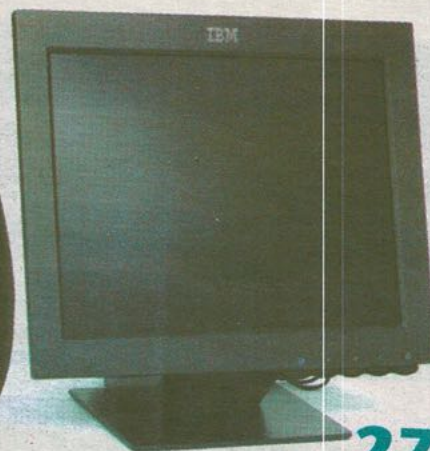
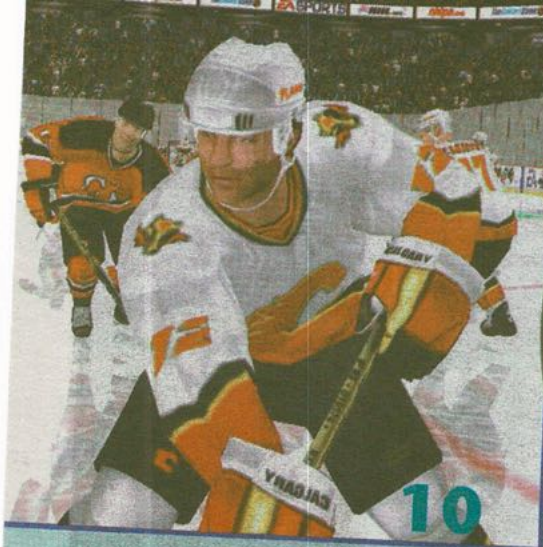
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It's time once again for our annual Digital Design Contest. See page 65 for details.

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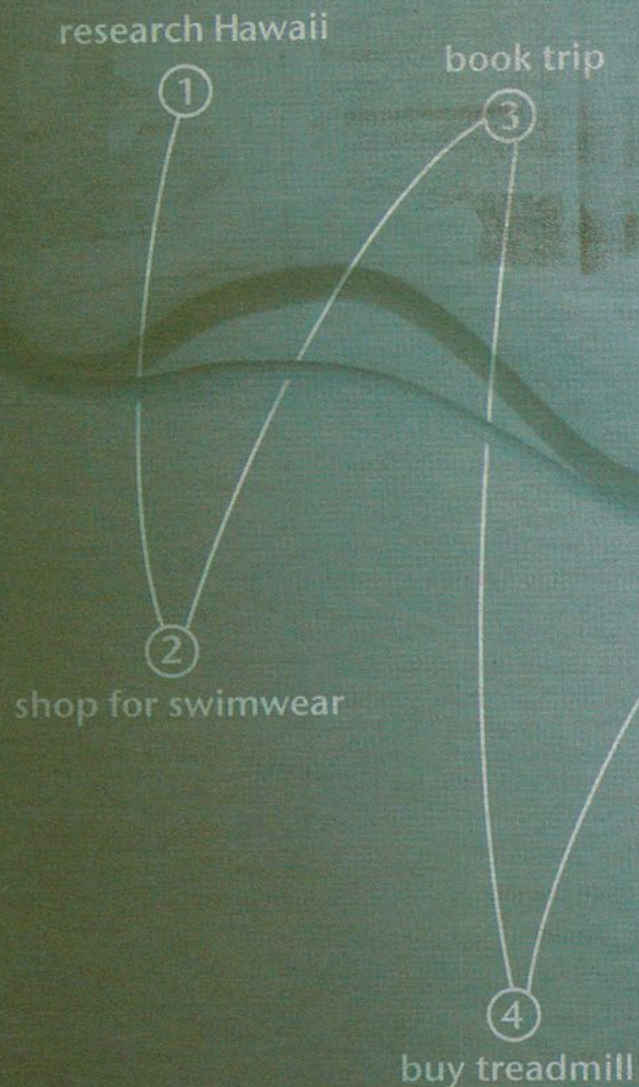
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What was once North America's largest technology show is just a shadow of its former self. COMDEX in Las Vegas, which took place from the 16th to the 22nd of November, is smaller than previous incarnations and the parent organization, Key3Media Group, is considering seeking bankruptcy protection under Chapter 11 of the US Bankruptcy Code. In a statement released just a few short days before the start of COMDEX, the company stated, "Key3Media's board of directors has decided the Company cannot continue to operate its businesses in the near term under its existing capital structure and that it would ... explore a possible restructuring."

Is this the end of what used to be the largest technology exhibit in North America? Simply put – no. There are rumours that a buyer is waiting in the wings. The real truth is that a central North American technology show is needed. It is where new technologies can be showcased and businesses can get together to make the deals that will see these technologies come to the marketplace.

For journalists it is a chance to see these technologies up close and personal and meet the people behind the technological advances that are driving our society. Despite the Damoclean sword that hangs over COMDEX, there were some very interesting technologies to view. There were no revolutionary breakthroughs on display at COMDEX, but as one of my colleagues points out – sometimes a few evolutionary steps will make a revolution.

An evolutionary step in a dragging revolution was evident in the field of digital video. There were about five companies displaying their wares at COMDEX. The significance is that the focus of all the products was the entry-level consumer. There were no high-end products on display at all. In a wily way, the manufacturers have realized that the only way that



the home digital video revolution will take hold is if the process of creating quality videos becomes easy and accessible to the average user who has no desire to learn complex editing procedures. Most of the packages that were on display have very simple editing features that let users create watchable videos in a few minutes without much fuss. The programs all automate certain aspects of the video editing process to make this procedure quite painless. Most of these programs had a DVD/VCD authoring and burning feature built right into it. We'll be featuring

reviews of many of these products when they become available in future months.

Another interesting innovation was burner/printers that could burn CDs and DVDs and print a wonderful, full-colour face on the disk. No need for labels. There were four companies that featured their technologies at COMDEX. The products ranged from a price of about \$400 to \$14,000. True, the high end of the price spectrum was a small manufacturing plant that featured a thermal transfer printer. The low end was a simple inkjet printer that was designed to print on all types of media, including CDs. I found these products fascinating, not just because most of them incorporated a cool set of robotics, but because it really gives an individual control over the delivery of a message. I'm sure that many bands and independent movie makers will love these products. Again, look for the reviews in the coming months.

Nestor Gula can be reached by e-mailing nestor@tcp.ca ♦

Reader Feedback

One turbine is hardly a revolution

Re: Alternative power coming to Toronto, *TC!* December edition.

Thank you for giving readers information on the WindShare project at Exhibition place, however, it is important to note that there is only one turbine currently being erected. This hardly constitutes "alternative power," as the power it will produce will be but a drop in Lake Ontario, relative to Toronto's power needs. Rather, this single turbine is at best a small scale experiment to see how a co-op ownership will work, and at worst, just a novelty for tourists

visiting the Ex to see that Toronto is a city on the cutting edge.

I'm all for putting up wind turbines wherever space allows, but labeling one wind turbine an alternative when in fact it's just an experiment is misleading.

David Keele

Big Brother born in 1984?

Re: Should police force your ISP to spy on you? - *TC!* December edition.

Maybe we've misinterpreted George Orwell's writings. Could it be that Big Brother (BB) was BORN in 1984? Now

that he's 18 years old and looking for work we should begin to worry.

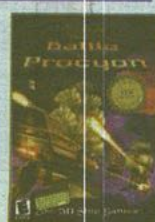
Fortunately for BB, the world is being overrun by terrorism and there'll be plenty of openings for such a single-minded individual. He'll probably find an entry-level position with a police force and then, with experience, move on to head a government department or agency where he will enjoy a long and rewarding career.

Watch for Big Brother's name in the headlines as he progresses to unparalleled heights.

George Dunbar

Letter of the Month

For his letter this month, David Keele wins a copy of Disney's *Treasure Planet: Battle at Procyon*. *Battle at Procyon* is a real-time strategy game designed to be accessible to first-time RTS players, and still fun for advanced players. *Battle at Procyon* takes place after the events of the *Treasure Planet* movie, and contains an in-depth storyline all its own.



Letters on issues raised in the paper or general computer topics are welcome. Please be brief. We regret that we are unable to look up stories from past issues, suggest products, or solve all your computer problems. All correspondence must include your full name in addition to your e-mail or snail-mail address. Letters may be edited for space or content.

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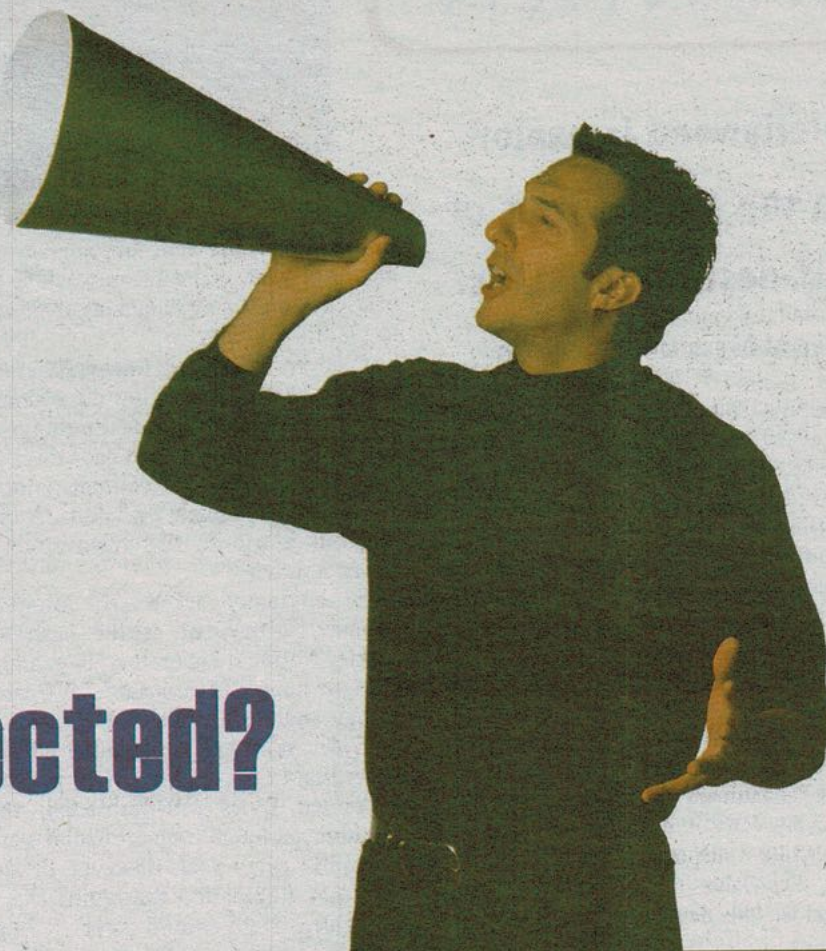
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Hollywood is exploring the possibilities of self-destructing DVDs.

By ANDREW MOORE-CRISPIN

The idea behind these discs is that the optical coating on the read surface starts to break down after the disc has been removed from its special packaging, rendering it unreadable after a certain amount of time – anywhere from hours to weeks, according to SpectraDisc (www.spectradisc.com), one company that is trying to patent the idea.

The key area where self-destructing DVDs could come into play is in the rental market, the company says. Rather than scrambling to return a rented DVD movie, consumers could just throw the disc away after it has become unreadable. While a disposable format for oft-times disposable movies seems like a natural fit, this development, given that

North Americans rent on average 33 movies a year, could mean a whole lot of useless plastic discs making their way to landfill.

However, Flexplay (www.flexplay.com), another company working on a similar self-destructing disc technology, is encouraging users to send back discs for recycling, and raises a counter-point of a reduction of vehicle emissions by cutting out a trip to the video store to return a movie.

The company asked Dr. Jonathan Koomey, a scientist at the Lawrence Berkley National Laboratory, to examine both the impact of disposable DVD technology and the benefit of fewer trips to the video store to return rented movies. According to his research, if 10 per cent of rented DVDs self-destructed, that would mean 5,600 tonnes of solid waste in landfill every year. However, he also says that eliminating the return trip to the video store would save 177,660

litres (47,000 gallons) of gasoline a year, based on 33 rentals per family, per year.

Other possibilities for the self-destructing DVDs might be movie screeners, which are DVD versions of a movie sent to theatres before the big screen release to drum up interest in the film for theatre owners. Screener DVDs are the leading cause of movies finding their way to peer-to-peer networks or newsgroups before they even hit theatres. The technology can also be applied to other optical storage media, like CDs.

Reach out and smoke somebody

Fragapalooza came east on the weekend of Nov. 29, bringing the huge Edmonton-native LAN party to the International Centre in Mississauga.

Fragapalooza East is open to partici-

pants from across Canada, and offers the geek "l33t" (elite) a chance to see and be seen. Gamers were playing *Unreal Tournament 2003*, *CounterStrike*, *Warcraft III*, and

continued on page 26

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Best computer games of 2002

Forget about all this attention given to the console wars

between Nintendo, Microsoft

and Sony.

By MARC SALTZMAN

If it's selection, innovation and massively multiplayer gaming you're after, look no further than your beloved PC.

That's right — your Windows-based computer is where all the action is in 2002. But with so many titles to choose from, it can be a tad overwhelming to find out what's hot and what's not.

Consider the following your personal holiday shopping guide to the very best PC games of the year, each divided into specific genre. All titles are roughly \$60 to \$70 each, and keep in mind many of them offer a free downloadable demo to try before you buy.

Happy holidays!

Action

Grand Theft Auto III (Rockstar Games)

Being bad never felt so good. As with its PlayStation 2 brethren, players assume the role of an up-and-coming criminal looking to climb the ranks of the underworld. This is achieved by taking such seedy jobs as carjacking, destroying evidence, delivering merchandise, running rival gangs off the road, shooting witnesses and blowing up mob bosses.

Tony Soprano, eat your heart out.

But in this sequel, Liberty City is rendered in true 3D, so players can drive or walk around this huge metropolis from a third-person perspective (not a top-down, 2D view like in the previous *Grand Theft Auto* games). Amazingly, it looks and feels like a real city: Sidewalks are bustling with pedestrians going about their business; there's over 50 different kinds of cars, trucks and buses (and drivers obey traffic lights); and buildings are built to scale, complete with proper signage and back alleyways.

Additional features of the PC version include customizable skins, a tweaked saved-game option and the ability to add music to the radio stations in the game.

Medal of Honor: Allied Assault (Electronic Arts)

Can one man truly make a difference? This is the question posed in *Medal of Honor: Allied Assault*, one of the finest

action games of the year.

In this WW2-themed shooter, players slip into the uniform of Lt. Mike Powell, a seasoned soldier of the renowned 1st Ranger Battalion. At the start of the game, in 1942, Powell is hand-picked by the OSS (Office of Strategic Services), to serve his country in a number of deadly covert assignments, taking him across the deserts of North Africa, through the trenches of France, across Norway and eventually over the Rhine into Nazi Germany.

One such mission is a dramatic replication of the D-Day Omaha Beach invasion.

And what war game would be complete without gratuitous weapons? Gamers have access to a wide arsenal of authentic WW2 firearms such as Walther PP7 handguns, shotguns, automatic rifles, bazookas, grenades and "sticky bombs," to name a few. There is also the ability to climb into vehicles such as Sherman tanks, a submarine and army jeeps, or behind a number of stationary automatic weapons to spray the enemy with bullets.

Medal of Honor: Allied Assault is not for everyone — it's a very intense and immersive war game — but for those looking to star in an epic action film set in the war-torn '40s, *Medal of Honor: Allied Assault* is as close as it gets.

Honourable Mentions: *No One Lives Forever 2* (Sierra/Fox Interactive), *Unreal Tournament 2003* (Infogrames), *The Thing* (Black Label Games), *Mafia* (Gathering of Developers), and *America's Army* (US Army).

Role-playing games

Neverwinter Nights (Infogrames)

This homegrown RPG is one of the most addictive computer games to date. Period.

Developed by BioWare in Edmonton, *Neverwinter Nights* follows the 3rd Edition *Dungeons & Dragons* rule-set, and thrusts the player into a rich medieval world overrun by chaos.

Like any good RPG, the epic storyline takes many twists and turns before the climactic finale, plus there are innumerable side-quests to partake in for money, experience or prestige. In true pen and paper fashion, gamers first choose the type of character to play from the seemingly endless list of classes and races.

As a neat twist, the solo game can be played alone or cooperatively via the Net or over a LAN.

Furthermore, *Neverwinter Nights* is the first game of its kind allowing a chosen player to assume the role of Dungeon Master during multiplayer matches. Like the classic *D&D*, players can take control of the game in real-time by introducing new elements such as adding new monsters, items, portals and so on.

Neverwinter Nights also ships with the Aurora Toolset editor so gamers can create their very own modules and swap them online.

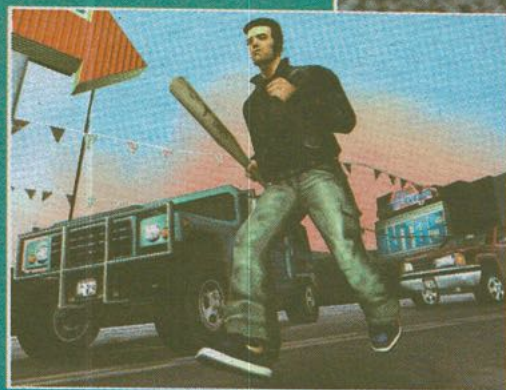
Don't bother making plans 'til sometime next summer.

continued on page 18



Neverwinter Nights
(Infogrames Games)
above

Medal of Honor:
Allied Assault
(Electronic Arts)
right



Grand Theft Auto III
(Rockstar Games)
above

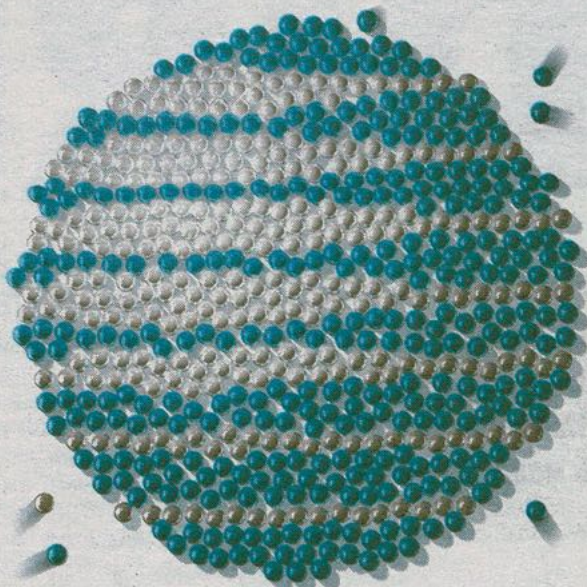
The Elder Scrolls III:
Morrowind
(Bethesda Softworks)
right



Syberia
(Dreamcatcher Games)
above

NHL 2003
(EA Sports)
right





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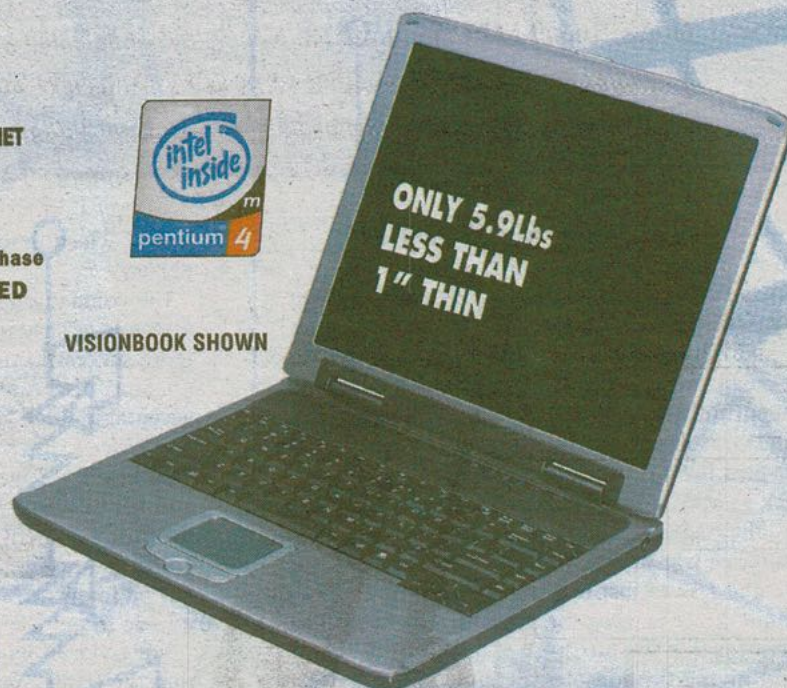
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Console video game gift guide

If you have been waiting until this holiday season to buy someone on your gift list a console video game system, you are wise, and if you're on someone's gift list and getting a console, you're lucky.

By ANDREW MOORE-CRISPIN

Sony's PlayStation 2 (PS2) has been out for over two years, Nintendo's GameCube for just over one year and Microsoft's Xbox turned one on Nov. 15. That means no waiting lists for consoles this season, no opportunistic online auctioneers hawking the hard-to-find consoles at exorbitant prices and no spending \$500-plus for a just-released console.

Back in May, a post E3 (Electronic Entertainment Expo, the huge annual video game event and trade show) price war took place, dropping the price of Xbox and PS2 to just below \$300 and the GameCube to about \$230, making the systems a more realistic present for this season.

Also, giving the consoles a couple of years to battle for dominance means there are plenty of titles to choose from, and makes it a safe bet that all three consoles will be supported with new software for some time to come.

What to consider

Probably the first thing to consider when looking for a console for someone on your gift list is the age of the recipient.

Each of the big three has software aimed at key demographics (8- to 14-years or 14- to 18-years, for example) but some focus more on one demographic than the others.

For younger gamers, the GameCube is likely the best option. The price tag of \$229.95, compared to the other two at close to \$300 doesn't hurt, but more important perhaps is the fact that Nintendo has the

widest selection of titles suitable for younger gamers.

The company has recently made some attempts at shedding its kiddie image, some more successful than others, but the fact remains; discerning parents will find more acceptable titles in Nintendo's lineup than in any other.

Games like *Super Mario Sunshine*, *Animal Crossing* and *Mario Party 4* all carry E (Everyone) ratings from the Entertainment Software Ratings Board (ESRB). These games have huge appeal for younger gamers, but be forewarned: Parents may find themselves unable to put the controller down with these ones too.

Nintendo, in its attempts to shake the misconception that the GameCube is for kids only, has released some M (Mature) rated titles that might appeal to older gamers. Combined with the appeal of franchise characters like Mario, Donkey Kong, Link, Samus and others, the GameCube could be a good choice for any gamer on your list.

However, for more discerning gamers concerned with the very best in graphics, broadband online gaming and some great titles aimed squarely at an older audience, the Xbox would be the better choice. For sheer volume of software titles and arguably some of the best exclusive titles that come with having the biggest install base (about 40 million shipped worldwide at last count), PS2 would be the best choice.

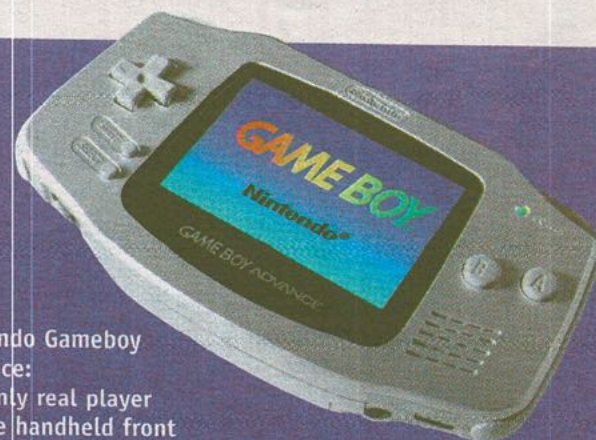
Taking it online

Online gaming has been a mainstay on the PC for
continued on page 20

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Controller - S:
More accessible
and usable than
the original -
no need for
giant hands
anymore



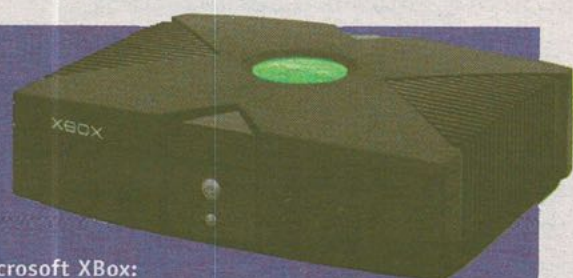
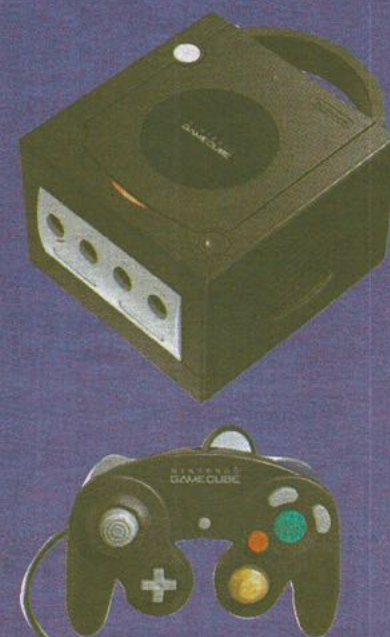
Nintendo Gameboy
Advance:
The only real player
on the handheld front



Sega Dreamcast:
The first
casualty but
still available
and still good



Nintendo GameCube:
The (usually) family friendly console



Microsoft Xbox:
The graphics power house



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Playstation 2:
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Best computer games of 2002
continued from page 10

The Elder Scrolls III: Morrowind (Bethesda Softworks)

Unlike *Neverwinter Nights*, a solo and multiplayer game that's played from an isometric top-down perspective, *The Elder Scrolls III: Morrowind* is a single-player-only game that is played from a first-person perspective.

Therefore, all the action in this fantasy world is seen through the "eyes" of the character.

And boy, is this game huge. The tale includes more than 3,000 NPCs (non-player characters) and hundreds of monsters to interact with, giving the impression this open-ended (and certainly non-linear) game is as limitless as the player's imagination.

As with its predecessors, players must first spend time customizing the race, class and look of the character before setting out on the lengthy expedition.

Like other RPGs, the gameplay involves exploring these huge towns and countrysides, while accepting varied quests, battling creatures and gaining experience points.

There's also a free *Morrowind* editor for users to create their own worlds and swap them online with other RPG enthusiasts.

As if this 100-hour adventure wasn't enough, Bethesda recently launched *Tribunal*, the first official expansion pack for the critically-acclaimed game.

Honourable Mentions: *Earth & Beyond* (Westwood Studios), *Freedom Force* (Electronic Arts), *Dungeon Siege* (Microsoft) and *Icewind Dale II* (Interplay).

Adventure

Syberia (Dreamcatcher Games)

Syberia is a Canadian-made point-and-click adventure that marries traditional computer game elements with breathtaking visuals and movie-quality music.

The game stars Kate Walker, a hot-shot lawyer from New York who has just arrived in Valadilene, France, to finalize the takeover of an automaton factory. While the residents of this quaint town dislike the resemblance of automatons to robots, that's essentially what these mechanical doodads are.

As luck would have it, the owner of the company has just died, leaving her younger brother, Hans, in charge of the operation. Problem is, he's been missing for years. But Walker is determined to track down Hans to complete the buyout, and in doing so, unearths a

fascinating family history that shifts her efforts from greed to justice.

Syberia is reminiscent of classic adventure games, where the player uses the mouse to navigate around the game world from a third-person perspective, collecting clues by talking with people, picking up items for her inventory and using them to solve conundrums at key points in the game.

This game is perfect for those who'd rather use their brains than brawn — it's a solid pick that'll whisk you away in a tale you won't soon forget.

Shadow of Destiny (Konami)

Murder-mystery thrillers aren't anything new, but when it's your own death you're trying to prevent, things get a lot more interesting.

Such is the premise behind the aptly-named *Shadow of Destiny*, a unique, and certainly challenging, adventure based on last year's PlayStation 2 game.

In a sort of purgatory-like dimension, the main character, Eike, is given a second chance to return to the land of the living. He's also handed a time-traveling device to unravel the history of events in this small European town and find out who his killer is before it's too late.

Along with the attractive in-game graphics, this 10-chapter adventure features more than three hours of cinematics that help push this intriguing story along.

There are multiple scenarios and endings, depending on the decisions made by the player. The colourful characters help make this tale a memorable one as well.

Shadow of Destiny is definitely an interesting twist on the PC industry's oldest genre.

Strategy

WarCraft III: Reign of Chaos (Blizzard Entertainment)

This eagerly-anticipated real-time strategy sequel offers a number of advancements over its predecessors: 3D graphics, four distinct races instead of two and "legendary heroes," each with its unique side to the story.

It is these heroes who form the focus of the single-player game, as they lead followers through four linked campaigns.

And in an RPG-like twist, these heroes can gain new attributes over time to make them more powerful.

For the uninitiated, the gameplay in these *WarCraft* adventures involves creating dozens of units and buildings, gathering resources to support these initiatives (such as harvesting lumber or mining gold), researching new technolo-

gies and exploring the map to accomplish the varied tasks. In many cases, the gameplay involves defending a village or building up an army and fighting against enemies by land, sea or air.

Blizzard has also fully revamped its Battle.net service (www.battle.net) for fast (and still free) online multiplayer gaming, now supporting up to 12 players per match and new game modes.

Hands down, Blizzard Entertainment's *WarCraft III: Reign of Chaos* is worthy of your time and money — especially for fantasy fanatics with a penchant for magic and mystery.

Age of Mythology (Microsoft Games)

From Ensemble Studios, the designers responsible for the coveted *Age of Empires* strategy series, comes Microsoft's latest time-waster, *Age of Mythology*.

As with its forerunners, players must choose a civilization and help it grow into a military, economical or technological force to contend with. But this time around, mythology is mixed into real history as mortal men must do battle with gods and monsters.

In total, there are 20 different mythological creatures, based on the ancient history of the Norse, Greek and Egyptian cultures.

Need examples? Perhaps you'd like to create a few Cyclops or Medusas to terrorize opponents? Or maybe send a prayer to Ra or Zeus to cause a meteor shower on an unsuspecting village?

The game is also the first in the series to feature a true 3D universe, so players can rotate the screen for a better view or zoom in and out of the action. Also, special effects such as tornadoes, lightning, rain and earthquakes are as attractive as they are fun to induce.

Strategy players need not look any further for a solo and multiplayer game worthy of clicking away for hours at a time. See full review pg 59.

Honourable Mentions: *Medieval: Total War* (Activision) and *Heroes of Might and Magic IV* (3DO).

Sports/Simulations

NHL 2003 (EA Sports)

EA Sports' latest video game encompasses what makes the real sport of hockey so special: Power, finesse, attitude, strategy and emotion.

Naturally, *NHL 2003* includes all the NHL, All-Star and international teams and players you'd expect from a hockey game, but this year's version features a few new tweaks.

Right off the bat (er, stick), seasoned players will enjoy the added player con-

trol with the new "dynamic deke" option; fiddling with the right stick of an analogue gamepad creates custom deke moves on the fly used to fake opponents.

This new level of puck control takes some getting used to but is a welcome addition — and serves as extra trash-talking fodder when playing against a friend.

Once these dekes are mastered and goals are won, players build up their "Game Breaker" meter; once maxed, players have a temporary advantage on the ice played out in a dramatic slow-motion, followed by an intensified replay.

As with last year's version, *NHL 2003* features a deep franchise mode with player and team stats calculated and kept from year to year.

If you haven't indulged in a past NHL video game, fret not — novice players may opt for the new "beginner" skill mode, which includes an audio tutorial embedded into the game itself.

Without a doubt, *NHL 2003* is the deepest and most gratifying hockey simulation on the planet.

The puck stops here.

Tony Hawk Pro Skater 3 (Activision)

This hot series from Activision has made its way to the PC as a stellar "extreme sports" title for players young and old alike.

In *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 3*, players choose to skate as the legendary Tony Hawk or other popular street and vertical skaters, such as Elissa Steamer, Rune Glifberg and Jamie Thomas. Players will need to unlock a good number of them by completing objectives, plus there are hidden characters and the option to create your own custom male or female skaters, too.

The goal is to pull tricks and tough combo moves in a number of interactive locations, including real and fictitious skate parks in the United States, Canada, Paris and Tokyo. Some modes are timed, others require the player to rack up as many points as possible and others are objective-based, such as "impress that gang of kids" or "grind down this handrail."

Other features include a rockin' soundtrack and a course designer for those skilled enough at creating custom skate parks.

A good controller is strongly recommended to experience a rush similar to its console counterparts.

Honourable Mentions: *Combat Flight Simulator 3* (Microsoft), *F1 2002* (EA Sports), *2002 FIFA World Cup* (EA Sports) and *Madden NFL 2003* (EA Sports). ♦

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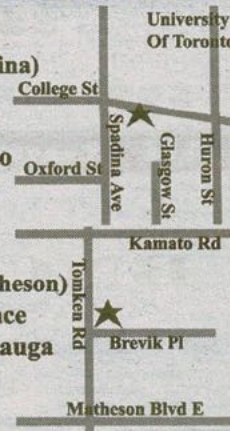
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Console video game gift guide

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quite some time, and now it's the console gamer's turn. Each of the big three have announced or executed plans for getting console gamers online.

While Sega's now defunct Dreamcast was the first console to offer online gaming, Sony looks to be the first to really make it work.

The company released its Network Adapter on Aug. 27, and stores have been selling out of them ever since. Sony has promised 14 online titles on store shelves by year end, and had a number (*SOCOM: US Navy SEALs*, *Twisted Metal: Black Online* and *NFL GameDay 2003* among them) available at launch.

Microsoft's online initiative Xbox Live launched on the first anniversary of the console (Nov. 15). The Xbox looks to be focusing on hardcore gamers, by making it the only broadband exclusive console on the market.

Microsoft has a lineup of seven games available at launch, with 10 more on shelves in time for the holidays.

Unlike the other two consoles, which make gamers buy a separate network adapter (PS2 has both dial-up and broadband on the same adapter, while

Nintendo is releasing a separate product for each option), the Xbox comes with an Ethernet port standard. However, it should be noted that to make use of said port with online titles, gamers will have to buy an Xbox Live Starter Kit for about \$80.

Nintendo's online plans are less easily defined than those of the Xbox and PS2. Nintendo recently released its broadband and dial-up adapters, followed one day later by the only confirmed online GameCube title, Dreamcast favourite *Phantasy Star Online Episode I & 2* on Oct. 28. Outside of these two details, Nintendo has revealed little about its online plans. The company has said it will focus on the gameplay style and franchise characters that made the word Nintendo synonymous with video games. In short, if someone on your gift list is excited about the potential for online gaming, look at the other two; Nintendo isn't ready to commit to the idea just yet.

Price for online gaming

The necessary equipment to get online is only part of the equation. Xbox Live will charge gamers a fee to use the service, likely in the region of \$15 a month, with one year free upon

purchase of the Starter Kit. This means that all games on Xbox Live will be covered under this fee structure, with no extra charges. Meanwhile, PS2 and GameCube are leaving server setup and support to game publishers, which means that gamers should expect a model similar to PC online gaming: Many games will be free to play online, though some blockbuster titles (*EverQuest* comes to mind, charging US\$9.89 per month for server access on the PC, and recently announced for the PS2) will charge gamers a monthly fee. The only online GameCube title, Sega's *Phantasy Star Online Episode I & II*, is charging gamers US\$8.95 a month to play the game online. No other titles on any system so far are charging gamers for server access, but forewarned is forearmed, as the saying goes.

Entertainment

Obviously, the point of buying a console game system is to play games, but two of the big three give an added incentive to gamers by including the ability to play DVDs.

PS2 is the only system with DVD playback out of the box, while the Xbox requires a special dongle that plugs in to a controller port to unlock the feature. The dongle is an infrared receiver, which comes with a sleek Xbox DVD player remote control and costs roughly \$50.

GameCube, thanks to its smaller format storage media (the size of a mini CD) is the only system on which DVD playback isn't even an option.

In reality, if the PS2 is going to be used often as a DVD player, users will find the PS2 control clunky and inconvenient, so an infrared receiver and remote control similar to the Xbox one might be in order.

Xbox and PS2 can both play back audio CDs, though the likelihood of this being a deciding factor is slim. However, Xbox adds the ability to rip audio tracks to the on-board hard drive, allowing gamers to make their own game soundtracks instead of listening to the ones included in a game.

Cost of ownership

As with just about all technology, the initial expenditure, while usually the largest, is never the last.

The most obvious extra expenditure will be on software. While some of the big three have already announced holiday bundles that include at least one game (see *Toronto Computes!* December, archived on CanadaComputes.com), new titles are released all the time, and giving a console with no games, while undoubtedly

a nice present, is a bit useless.

Other expenditures include extra controllers. Whether it's a combined gift for two or more kids, or a gift to an individual, getting more than one person in on the action is part and parcel of console gaming. Systems, unless bought under some sort of special promotion, come with one controller, with extras available for about \$40. Xbox and GameCube each have four controller ports, while PS2 gamers will have to invest in a multitap add-on to get more than two gamers in on the action.

Memory cards are another necessary addition with the GameCube and PS2 systems and cost about \$30. Xbox gamers can save their progress right on the hard drive, though to transport data, say to a friend's house, a memory card is needed.

Handhelds

Actually the "handhelds" subhead is something of a misnomer, as there is only really one player in the market: Nintendo.

The Game Boy Advance system is hugely popular with kids, though anyone riding the subway has likely seen at least a few commuters staring down at its poorly lit colour screen.

The GBA retails for about \$110 with games going for between \$40 and \$50.

Nintendo gives added incentive for GameCube owners to buy a GBA (or vice versa) with some pretty innovative connections between the two. For about \$15, gamers can buy a Game Link cable to connect the GBA and GameCube. There are a few titles that make use of this feature, usually in the form of downloadable mini-games. For instance, *Animal Crossing* allows gamers to download an island and its resident onto the GBA, which becomes something like a more graphically advanced Tomagachi (parents will remember that name from the virtual pet trend that hit a few years ago).

Nintendo also released its e-Reader peripheral, which has gamers scanning Dot Codes, found on the sides of Pokemon-style trading cards, to get hidden items in some GameCube games or mini-games on the GBA itself. These Dot Codes can also contain more detailed statistics on Pokemon characters that, once scanned, can be seen on the GBA screen.

Nintendo also released a series of old 8-bit NES (Nintendo Entertainment System, Nintendo's first foray into the console gaming market) games, which can be stored on the e-Reader's internal memory.

For some parents, this might serve as

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AMD 1.2 DURON CPU + MAINBOARD \$149	Logitech OPTICAL Wireless KB/Mouse \$25/25	Link Router 4 ports \$75
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	Microtek Flatbed color V6LUP/E3/X6 \$205/195/219	Linksys Wireless Network Card / PCMCIA \$100
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		DLINK Wireless Router / CARD \$189 / 110
		DLINK 10/100 S / 8 / 16 ports \$85 / 89 / 169
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256MB SDRAM PC133 Memory
30GB 7200rpm hard drive
17" 1280 .27 monitor
Integrated Savage 3D Video
Mini Tower Case with Pentium® 4 Power Supply
LG IDE 52X CD Drive, 1.44M Floppy drive
Build-in 10/100BT LAN, 2 USB Ports
AC97 Audio with Amplifier Speaker
AOpen 104 keys keyboard,
Logitech Wheel mouse

\$799

CHRISTMAS SPECIAL



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Intel® Pentium® 4 Processor 1.8 GHz
Intel® D845GLADL Desktop Board
256MB DDR PC266 Memory
Seagate 40GB 7200rpm hard drive
NEC AS75F 17" .25 monitor
Intel® Extreme Graphics Video
Med. Tower Case with Front USB & 300W Power Supply
LG IDE 48X16X48 CD-Rewriter, 1.44M Floppy drive
Build-in 10/100BT LAN, Maximum 4 USB2.0 Ports
SoundMax 2.0 with Altec Lansing AVS200W Speaker
Keytronic 104 keys keyboard
Logitech Wheel mouse
Microsoft Windows® XP Home

\$1329

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Serious Station 3113

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Intel® D845PESVL Desktop Board
256MB DDR PC333 Memory
Seagate 40GB 7200rpm hard drive
NEC AS75F 17" .25 Flat Screen monitor
Geforce4 MX440SE 64M DDR Video Card
Med. Tower Case with Front USB & 300W Power Supply
LG 48X16X48 CD-Rewriter, 1.44M Floppy drive
Build-in 10/100BT LAN, Maximum 4 USB2.0 Ports
SB Live 5.1 sound with Altec Lansing AVS500W Speaker
Microsoft Multimedia keyboard
Microsoft Optical mouse
Microsoft Windows® XP Home

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BUILD YOUR OWN SERVER!

Intel® Server Board S845WD1-E \$370

- Support Intel® Pentium® 4 processor up to 2.53GHz
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- Two Intel® 10/100+ Server Network Connections
- Integrated Promise® ATA/100 RAID, support RAID 0, 1
- Integrated ATI® Rage® XL 8MB video, and 4x AGP slot
- Heceeta 6 Management Controller, monitor heat, fan, etc.
- Remote management with Intel® LANDesk® Client Manager
- Tested O/S: Windows® 2000 Server, Red Hat® Linux 7.2

Intel® Server Board SE7500CW2 \$710

- Support one or two Intel® Xeon® processors up to 2.4GHz
- Max. Memory 2GB DDR200/266 registered 72-bit ECC
- Two Intel® 10/100+ Server Network Connections
- Two ATA/100 EIDE channels, plus
- Two Promise® ATA/100 RAID channels, support RAID 0, 1
- Integrated ATI® Rage® XL 8MB video
- Winbond® 83627HF Management Controller
- Remote management with Intel® LANDesk® Client Manager
- Three 64-bit PCI bus, two 32-bit PCI bus
- Tested O/S: Windows® 2000 Adv. Server, Novell® Netware 6, Red Hat® Linux 7.2, Turbo Linux 7.0, Caldera® OpenLinux 8.0
- Optional single-channel Ultra 160 SCSI (not included)

Graphic Station 3112

Dual (2) Intel® Xeon® Processors 2.4 GHz
With Intel® Hyper-Threading Technology
Efficiency Multithreading and Multitasking
Supermicro® P4DCE+ Workstation Board
512MB RAMBUS Memory, Intel® 10/100 LAN
Chenbro® SR10403 Chassis with 460W Power Supply
WD 120GB 7200rpm ATA/100 8MB cache Hard Drive
NEC AS95F 19" .25 Flat Screen monitor
ATI® FireGL 8800 DDR 128MB 4X AGP Graphic card
LG 16X DVD Drive and LG 40X12X40 CD-Rewriter
1.44M FL drive, Microsoft Multimedia KB & Opt. Mouse
Microsoft Windows® XP Professional



\$4339

Real-Server 3119

Dual (2) Intel® Xeon® Processors 2.4 GHz
With Intel® Hyper-Threading Technology supports
Efficiency Multithreading and Multitasking
Intel® SE7500CW2 Server Board
512MB DDR266 ECC with Register Memory
Intel® SC5200 Server Chassis with 450W Power Supply
WD 120GB 7200rpm ATA/100 8MB cache Hard Drive
Build-in Promise® RAID Controller
Dual (2) Intel® 10/100+ Server Ethernet Controller
Integrated ATI® Graphic video with 8MB
LG 52X CD-ROM, 1.44M FL drive, Keyboard & Mouse
O/S and Monitor are not included



\$3199 One Ultra160 SCSI channel Add \$208
RAID 1, mirroring 120GB drives Add \$310

Real-Server 3118

Intel® Pentium® 4 Processor 2.53 GHz
With 533Mhz system bus and 512KB L2 cache
Intel® S845WD1 Server Board at 533Mhz System Bus
256MB DDR266 ECC Memory
Medium Tower Case with 460W Power Supply
WD 80GB 7200rpm ATA/100 8MB cache Hard Drive
Build-in Promise® RAID Controller
Dual (2) Intel® 10/100+ Server Ethernet Controller
Integrated ATI® Graphic video with 8MB
LG 52X CD-ROM, 1.44M Floppy drive
Keyboard & Mouse
O/S and Monitor are not included



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Seagate 80GB Barracuda Super Quiet!	\$187
Seagate 120GB Barracuda Super Quiet!	\$265
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WD 40 GB, 8M cache (400JB)	\$155
WD 80 GB (800BB)	\$184
WD 80 GB, 8M cache (800JB)	\$199
WD 120 GB, 8M cache (1200JB)	\$299
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LAVA Firewire / USB 2.0 IDE Enclosure	\$122

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Seagate ST-336607LW U320 36G	\$435
Seagate ST-373307LW U320 73G	\$878
Seagate ST-3146807LW U320 146G	\$1698
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Adaptec 5100 USB 2.0 S ports	\$86
Adaptec 2908 / 2930U kit	Retail \$ 85 / 138
Adaptec Fireconnect 4300 kit	Retail \$ 78
LAVA ISA / PCI printer card	\$28 / 47
Promise Ultra ATA/133 controller	Retail \$ 68
Promise Fasttrak100 TX2 Raid	Retail \$ 139

Uninterruptible Power Supply

APC Backup-UPS 350 / 500	\$122 / 183
APC Backup-UPS Pro 500UC	\$215
APC Smart-UPS 700Net w/ Software	\$518

PROCESSORS (Please call for the

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Intel® Celeron® Processor 1.8 GHz	\$125
Intel® Celeron® Processor 2.0 GHz	\$155
Intel® Celeron® Processor 2.1 GHz	\$179
Intel® Celeron® Processor 2.2 GHz	\$209
Intel® Pentium® 4 Processor 1.7 GHz	\$222
Intel® Pentium® 4 Processor 1.8 GHz	\$252
Intel® Pentium® 4 Processor 2A GHz	\$287
Intel® Pentium® 4 Processor 2.4 GHz	\$339
Intel® Pentium® 4 Processor 2.53 GHz	\$409
Intel® Pentium® 4 Processor 2.66 GHz	\$529
Intel® Pentium® 4 Processor 2.8 GHz	\$689
Intel® Pentium® 4 Processor 3.06 GHz	\$1150
Intel® Xeon® Processor 2.0 GHz	\$415
Intel® Xeon® Processor 2.4 GHz	\$505
Intel® Xeon® Processor 2.6 GHz	\$795
Intel® Xeon® Processor 2.8 GHz	\$966

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Med Tower 6 bays ATX 250W	\$55
P4 Mini Tower 4 bays ATX 200W	\$57
P4 Med Tower 6 bays ATX 300W	\$69
P4 Med Tower ATX 300W with USB	\$72
AOpen Full Tower 10 bays 300W	\$129
In-Win P4 Micro ATX Case 250W	\$90
In-Win P4 Case 300W with USB	\$110
ATX Power 250W / 300W / 400W	\$35 / 46 / 69

SOUND CARDS / SPEAKERS

SB Live Dolby Digital 5.1	Bulk \$ 47
SB Audigy w/1394	Bulk \$ 93
SB Audigy Platinum II	Retail \$ 282
Altec Lansing AVS200W	\$22
Altec Lansing AVS300W 3pcs	\$42
Altec Lansing AVS500W 5pcs	\$62

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Intel® Server Boards	
SAI2, support ATA	\$630
SDS2, support SCSI U160	\$985
S845WD1, support ATA RAID 0,1	\$370
SE7500CW2, support ATA RAID 0,1	\$710
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All Desktop Boards has built-in audio:	
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D845GLADL 4PCI Video LAN	DDR \$174
D845GBVL 6PCI Video AGP LAN	DDR \$205
D845PESVL 5PCI AGP LAN	DDR333 \$193
D845PEBT2 5PCI AGP LAN RAID	DDR333 \$227
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CDs / DVDs / REWRITERS

LG int IDE 52X CD-Drive	Bulk \$ 31
LG int IDE 16X DVD Drive	Bulk \$ 64
LG int IDE 40 x 12 x 40 w/ software	Bulk \$ 77
LG int IDE 48 x 16 x 48 w/ software	Bulk \$ 84
LG int IDE 32 x 10 x 40 + 16X DVD	Bulk \$ 129
Pioneer A05 int IDE DVD-R/RW writer	Retail \$ 489
HP 2001 int IDE DVD-R/RW writer	Retail \$ 515
Roxio EZ-CD Creator V5.0	Bulk \$ 15
PowerDVD / WinDVD software	\$ 20
Blank CD-R 80 min. 100cps (Spindle)	\$ 38
Blank CD-R / CD-RW Sony	Retail \$13 / 29
Blank DVD-R / DVD-RW Sony	Retail \$ 20 / 33

RAMBUS 128M 800MHz-40

RAMBUS 256M 800MHz-40	\$160
RAMBUS 512M 800MHz-40	\$405

INPUT DEVICES

AOpen 104 keys Keyboard PS2	\$12
Keytronic 129 keys Keyboard PS2	\$15
Logitech Wheel Mouse PS2	\$13
Logitech Cordless Freedom Opt.(KB+Mouse)	\$133
MS Wheel Optical Mouse OEM	\$25
MS Multimedia Bundle(KB+Opt.Mouse)OEM	\$55
MS Wireless Optical Desktop (KB+Mouse)	\$119

MEMORY (Please call for the current

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SDRAM 128M, 133MHz	\$39
SDRAM 256M, 133MHz	\$57
SDRAM 512M, 133MHz	\$99
DDR 128M, PC266	\$60
DDR 256M, PC266	\$113
DDR 512M, PC266	\$220
DDR 256M, PC333	\$118
DDR 512M, PC333	\$225

VIDEO CARDS

D-Link DSC-C300 Webcam 30 fps	\$ 89
MSI 8878-170 MX440SE	64M \$119
MSI 8890-010 MX440	64M \$153
MSI 8870-040 T4200	64M \$220
MSI 8872-070 T4600	128M \$399
ATI TV Wonder (add-on PCI)	Retail \$ 99
ATI Radeon 7000 SDRAM	32M \$55
ATI Radeon 7000 SDRAM v/o	64M \$60
ATI Radeon 7500LE DDR v/o	64M \$88
ATI Radeon 9000 DDR v/o	128M \$148
ATI Radeon 9000PRO DDR v/o	64M \$149
ATI Radeon 9000PRO DDR v/o	128M \$180
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ATI All-in-Wonder 8500	128M Retail \$445
ATI All-in-Wonder 9700PRO	128M Retail \$655
ATI FireGL 8700	64M Retail \$255
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MONITORS

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NEC AS70	17" 1280 .27	\$215
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NEC AS95F	19" 1600 .25	\$355
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NEC LCD 1920NX	19" 1280 .29	\$1435
NEC LCD 2010X	20" 1280 .31	\$2155
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Viewsonic G90F	19" 1600 .25	\$415
Viewsonic G810	21" 1600 .25	\$755
Viewsonic P220F	22" 1600 .25	\$925

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USR 56K Int V.90 w/voice PCI HW	bulk \$ 78
USR 56K Ext V.92	\$138

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HP LaserJet 1200	10 ppm 1M	\$360
HP LaserJet 1200	15 ppm 8M	\$589
HP LaserJet 2200	19 ppm 8M	\$1035
HP LaserJet 4100	25 ppm 16M	\$1679
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3Com 3C905 10/100BT	Bulk \$ 53
3Com 3C996B-T 1000BT Server Adapter	\$225
3Com 3C16470 16 ports Switch	\$465
3Com 3C16471 24 ports Switch	\$655
AOpen USB 10/100BT Adapter	\$39
AOpen OP330 10/100BT PCMCIA card	\$45
D-Link PCI 10/100BT Adapter	\$19
Intel® Pro/100+ SEC Adapter	Bulk \$ 53
Intel® Pro/1000 Desktop Adapter	\$155
Intel® PCMCIA 10/100BT RealPort	\$119
Linksys BEFSR41 4 ports Switch	\$104
Linksys BEFSX41 4 ports VPN/Firewall	\$136
Linksys Wireless BEFW11S4	\$175
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Linksys Wireless 11M PCMCIA	\$102
Linksys Wireless 11M USB Adapter	\$102
Netgear FS108 8 ports Switch	\$96
Netgear FS116 16 ports Switch	\$229
Netgear JFS524 24 ports Switch	\$369
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Netgear 10/100BT 2 ports Print Server	\$165
USR 4 ports Router + Print Server	\$99
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Microsoft Office XP Professional Full Ver.	OEM \$505
Microsoft Office XP Professional Full Ver.	Retail \$779
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Windows XP Professional Full Version OEM	\$265
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Console video game gift guide

continued from page 20

added incentive; a chance to have another go at the games they used to play, be they *Excite Bike*, *Balloon Fight*, or *Donkey Kong Jr.*

Trading cards with Dot Codes go for about \$5, while e-Reader Classic Games packs cost about \$8.

Looks

Obviously, the look of a console won't be a major factor in the decision, though it might be nice to have a system that doesn't look too out of place in the entertainment unit.

GameCube is the smallest of the three, and can fit almost anywhere, while Xbox is relatively large; about the size of a larger VCR. PS2 has the sleekest look of the three, and gives gamers the option of laying the unit down flat or standing it up on its side.

What everyone else has

What system friends have can be a big factor in what system the lucky recipient would like to see under the tree. For instance, if all your child's friends have Xbox, chances are, that's what he or she would like to get. Going this route means users can borrow or trade games, share secrets, and lend or borrow hardware (controllers, for

example). Also, specifically with the Xbox, gamers can link up to four consoles together and get 16 people in on the action.

Budget gaming

While the big three consoles are great and anyone on your list should consider themselves lucky to get one, there are certain older systems that shouldn't be overlooked. The one that comes to mind was the first 128-bit console on the market, and also the first to fall: the Dreamcast.

Since Sega stopped production of the Dreamcast over two years ago, the price has fallen to about \$70. While new systems still in the box are hard to come by, there are still used ones to be had. However, since they are in somewhat short supply, the price used is also around \$70.

Dreamcast game production halted about six months after the console ended its life cycle, but there is still a library of over 300 games, and because the system is now defunct, these too can be had cheap, for around \$20.

The Dreamcast is also the closest thing to an open-source console there is, though it was never intended as such. The piracy that resulted after the console was "cracked" one month after its release was just another nail in the

Dreamcast's coffin. However, the upside is that there is a ton of homebrew applications and games out there: Everything from Colecovision and Intellivision emulators, to emulators of 16-bit consoles and handhelds, for more nefarious uses. There is also a Red Hat Linux installation designed to run on the Dreamcast and just about anything else you can imagine; even a shell that loads into the Dreamcast memory and allows users to run old Sierra games like *King's Quest*, *Police Quest*, and any number of other Quests, including *Space*.

The PSone is another option for budget conscious gamers, at just under \$80. There is already a huge library of games for this 32-bit system, and while game production has slowed to a trickle because developers are focusing on the newer generation systems, there are still some new releases coming out.

The PSone is a slimmed down re-release of the original PlayStation, and has some accessories, like a portable LCD screen that clips onto the top of the unit to make it a travel system. As an added bonus, PSone games can be played on the PS2 when gamers decide to upgrade.

Conclusion

Chances are, the gamer on your gift

list is already dropping hints as to what he or she would like to see under the tree.

If you're left to make the decision or want to keep it a surprise, remember that GameCube is the console best suited to younger gamers, though both Xbox and PS2 already have respectable libraries of games suitable for younger players. Both have also undertaken initiatives to bring more such games to their consoles.

If your gamer is more concerned with graphic quality and broadband online gaming, the Xbox will be the best suited. The Xbox also offers the benefit of an 8 GB hard drive — this means no memory cards, the ability to rip and store music for playback in-game, and faster load times in some games, as they store to the hard drive and internal memory as opposed to memory alone.

On the other hand, if the gamer on your list wants to keep with the status quo at a cost to graphic quality (don't get me wrong, the graphics are still very good) and keep his or her options open for either dial-up or broadband online play, then PS2 will fit the bill. PS2 also has a huge library of games, and gets the most exclusive titles, as it offers the biggest potential customer base to developers. ♦

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Small businesses still waiting for micro-payment systems

By TOM VENETIS

There is a whole set of small Canadian businesses that have been left out of the electronic commerce world. These businesses are typically one- or two-person operations, often operated out of a home and selling things such as home-made crafts, art or music.

The problem is that most credit card companies are not very interested in offering these kinds of small businesses merchant accounts and online credit card processing solutions that fit with the revenues these businesses generate. It's not that the credit card companies won't give a very small business a merchant account or even the means to process credit cards online. They will, but at a price.

"Studies have shown that accepting

credit cards online costs about 15 per cent of top line revenue, and that does not even cover the credit card fee," says Peter Turk, president of Toronto-based Spring Worth Inc. "Small merchants have a problem with this because if the transaction volumes are very low, such a cost is going to be very expensive for these kinds of small businesses."

Spring Worth (www.springworth.com) is currently in the final stages of rolling out an online payment mechanism that will allow small businesses and consumers to create digital money through their banks and then use that money to make online purchases, even those that only total a few cents.

The system works very much like an automated teller machine, letting users pull out the amount of cash they need to make a purchase and then transfer that amount to a merchant.

This means that if someone wants to purchase a single song for only \$0.50, or spend \$2 to get an electronic reprint of a newspaper article, Spring Worth's system will support it.

"Micro-payments right now are not very economical using today's credit cards," Turk adds. But if micro-payment

systems make such sense, why are there so few of them, especially in Canada?

Most people are familiar with the American-based PayPal micro-payment system, especially if they have done some shopping on eBay. In Canada, there is Vancouver-based Paystone Technologies Corp. (www.paystone.com), a private US and Canadian Internet payment company that allows small businesses to accept online payments as low as \$0.10. CertaPay Inc. (www.certapay.com) recently joined forces with several major Canadian banks to offer a person-to-person money transfer service, E-mail Money Transfers, which allows smaller business and person to transfer money securely between banks for transaction purposes.

In Vancouver, HyperWallet Systems Inc. (www.hyperwallet.com) lets small businesses and consumers create a HyperWallet, which acts as the electronic equivalent of a wallet. The HyperWallet is accessed through a personal or business online bank account. From there, money can be transferred into it or out of it as one would transfer money from one bank account to another. Once money has been transferred into the HyperWallet, one can then transfer that money to

another person or business in much the same way as one currently pays a utility or credit card bill online today.

Lisa Shields, CEO of HyperWallet Systems in Vancouver says that micro-payment systems will become more of a commonly accepted standard as they become integrated into normal banking. By becoming part of the established banking system, micro-payment systems will then be able to overcome the problems they have had in getting established among businesses and consumers.

"The reason most micro-payment systems don't work is that they face a chicken and egg problem," Shields says. "Before it is useful to consumers, they payment method has to be accepted by a wide number of merchants. But to be attractive to merchants they want to see a lot of customers using it."

By integrating micro-payment systems into regular banking, it should make it easier for merchants of all sizes to take advantage of the solutions and for consumers to feel better about using it as it will have the support of the banks.

HyperWallet Systems is in the process of adding additional small business features to its service, such as the ability to

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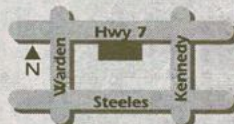
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Neverwinter Nights, to name but a few. Teams and single players were competing in organized tournaments for cash and prizes, and in impromptu pick-up matches, where the only prize is having fellow gamers recognize their skills.

Intel, Microsoft, Bell Sympatico and others sponsored Fragapalooza's first event outside of Edmonton, supplying prizes for participants and better prizes for the winners.

The key competition of Fragapalooza East was an eight-player free-for-all

Unreal competition, which started on the first day of the event and ended on Sunday, the last day of Fragapalooza East. Among the prizes up for grabs was a development PC that was used to make *Unreal Tournament 2003*, signed by the Digital Extremes developers.

The *Warcraft III* team tournament had gamers competing in two-on-two matches for a \$3,000 cash prize for the top team, \$1,500 for second place and \$500 for third.

Xbox also set up a *Halo: Combat Evolved* four-on-four tournament, which played out on the big screens,

using LCD projectors. The consoles were system-linked with four gamers to a box, playing on either side of projector screens, which acted as a barrier, keeping teams separated.

Fragapalooza East is a BYOC (bring your own computer) event, and gamers were showing off lots of custom cases and configurations, with water-cooled PCs and on-board neon lights a-plenty.

There were also companies selling their wares to the hardcore gamers present, such as the Zboard from Ideazon (www.ideazon.com), a keyboard set to release in February, which uses snap-on

interchangeable key configuration boards designed to use the keys contained in specific games like *Medal of Honor* and *Neverwinter Nights*. The base unit that accepts the snap-on modules is a PS2 device, but Ideazon it says it will be USB soon.

Also on display were vinyl case-wraps. System modders upload an image to the CaseWraps.com Web site, and then receive their image on a piece of adhesive vinyl. A case wrap is meant as an inexpensive alternative to having a PC case airbrushed, which I for one wasn't even aware was popular. ♦

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Entry-level flat panels

Prices of flat panel monitors have been dropping toward the \$500 mark for a while, and some have actually dipped below it.

By DAVE CHAPPELLE

That's still a fair bit of coin, but a lot of us were happy to pay that much for a cathode ray tube (CRT) monitor not long ago. Eight years ago, my 15-inch colour CRT was a deal at \$450, and it still works great. Nevertheless, I'm about to take up a friend's offer to trade it for a case of beverage, and replace it with a new liquid crystal display (LCD).

A 15-inch flat panel has the same viewing area as a 17-inch CRT. When you can get a 17-inch CRT for under \$200, why should you consider paying several hundred dollars more for a flat panel? The most obvious reason for upgrading is that flat panels require less space, use less power and generate much less heat. Wall mounting is an option with most, maximizing the already significant space saving.

Picture accuracy is also important. Though CRTs are still favoured by graphics professionals for their colour accuracy, flat panels provide a picture with virtually no distortion, especially if using a digital connection to the PC.

We tested units priced under \$700. In this range, monitors typically feature an analogue connector only (also known as the 15-pin or D-Sub connector). Some monitors at this

price may also feature the DVI (Digital Video Interface) connector, but this usually adds to the price and requires a compatible video adapter.

It's always best to sit directly in front of a monitor, but viewing angles of today's thin film transistor (TFT) units are wider, both vertically and horizontally, than early models you may remember. While viewing area has remained constant, the surrounding bezels are usually smaller. All the units we looked at had varying degrees of tilt, but they were not equipped with swivel and pivot adjustments, which are features found on pricier models.

There are a few things users can do to make the most of the advantages LCD monitors offer. Those who've been getting away with a mediocre video card won't be able to see the full benefits of a flat panel. If you can afford it, reward your eyesight: Spend about another \$100 and get yourself a display adapter that's capable of driving the crisp and clear images you want.

Lower the brightness and contrast to remove some of the harshness you may experience the first time you view text on a LCD. Text clarity can sometimes be improved by changing the resolution of your display adapter. Most TFT



IBM T541



KDS Rad5c



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Entry-level flat panels

continued from page 27

monitors are designed for a refresh rate of 60 Hz. Modern CRT monitors often have refresh rates of 75 or 85 Hz.

We must note that while there are many companies that sell LCD monitors under their own brand names, there are only three LCD manufacturers: LG, NEC, and Samsung. No matter what flat panel monitor you buy, inside will be a display from one of those manufacturers.

We used a Pentium 4 system running Windows XP, and an Nvidia GeForce2 video display adapter, with a refresh rate of 60 Hz and resolution of 1,024x768. Prices quoted are estimated street prices.

IBM T541

Size: 15-inch
Warranty: 3 years
Price: \$699
www.ibm.ca

The IBM "stealth black" finish is easy on the eyes, especially when working with colours onscreen. On screen display (OSD) controls are along the bottom right of the display. A wavy pattern guide allows you to find them by feel when working in a darkened room. There is ample tilt available to the display.

KDS Rad5c

Size: 15-inch
Warranty: 1 year parts, 3 years labour
Price: \$475 (converted from US\$300)
www.kdscanada.ca

OSD controls are placed tastefully out of the way, yet within easy reach on the right side. The charcoal grey and silver Rad5c has speakers built-in, though they are barely audible. The display has somewhat limited tilt.

At deadline, this unit had the lowest price of any we'd examined. For the same price, the company also offered a Rad5 in either silver or metallic blue, or a Rad5b in black, both without speakers. KDS will cross-ship a replacement to you if a defect appears within the first 90 days after purchase.

LG 786LS

Size: 17-inch
Warranty: 3 years
Price: \$699
www.lg.ca

While several others were very close, this was the only 17-inch monitor to actually squeeze in under our \$700 price cap. Obviously, if you've got the dough, an extra two inches of screen space is nice to have. Upon initial power-up, the silver and black unit asked for a moment to auto adjust itself. Maximum resolution is

1,280x1,024, but only if the refresh rate is upped to 75 Hz.

NEC-Mitsubishi MultiSync LCD1560V

Size: 15-inch
Warranty: 3 years
Price: \$525 (converted from US\$329)
www.necmitsubishi.com

We reviewed the 1550V, but by the time you read this, it will have been replaced by the 1560V, as announced at Comdex Las Vegas. Buyers can choose between white (a light grey, really) or black finishes.

The transformer is built in, which makes the case slightly thicker, but a typical computer power cord is all that's required. Cords are held in place by a clamp in the pedestal. OSD controls imitate those of a CRT, and are easily manipulated. The display can be tilted.

Philips 150S

Size: 15-inch
Warranty: 4 years
Price: \$599
www.philips.ca

Mac users will appreciate that a VGA-to-Mac adapter is included. The 150S is capable of being folded flat. It has a thicker chassis than others, because the transformer is built in, meaning a standard computer power cable plugs right in. Four OSD control buttons are large and straightforward. At four years parts and labour, the Philips warranty period is the longest of the manufacturers in this roundup.

Philips 150X

Size: 15-inch
Warranty: 4 years
Price: \$700
www.philips.ca

This unit represents the top of the Philips 15-inch LCD line. Speakers reside in the base, as does an audio amplifier with a separate power switch. A lighted volume control is easy to see in a darkened room. Audio in and microphone jacks are also on the base. You won't have to strain to hear the speakers, but don't expect them to replace those of your stereo. Note the four-year warranty.

Samsung 152B

Size: 15-inch
Warranty: 3 years
Price: \$649
www.samsung.ca

Available in silver and black, the 152B will fold flat. You can then slip on the included plate and wall-mount the 152B to save even more desk space. It's also the only one we tested that is height adjustable, moving up or down by 6 cm as the support stand folds into

the square base. This unique dual hinge setup means that the screen moves forward as it is lowered. Speakers are built into the base, with a hardware volume control, and a 1/8-inch headphone jack, too. The speakers won't win any audio awards, but can reach adequate volume.

TTX TTX-9154

Size: 15-inch
Warranty: 3 years
Price: \$499
www.ttx.ca

If moving up to a flat panel is more important to you than having extras, the price and full three-year warranty should make this unit tempting. Perched on its pedestal, this display tilts almost, but not quite, all the way horizontal. To reduce cable tangle on your desk, the video cable can be threaded through the pedestal, but then plugs into the display bottom vertically. The 9154 is available in both grey and black. You can add speakers for \$20 more.

Viewsonic VE500

Size: 15-inch
Warranty: 3 years
Price: \$559
www.viewsonic.com

This silver bezelled unit folds flat on its black oval base, allowing those standing over it to adjust the display for maximum viewability. OSD controls are centred in the bottom front of the bezel. If your adapter isn't set to 1,024x768, a warning message will appear every time you turn on the monitor or wake up your computer, until you disable the message. The VE500 is the Viewsonic entry-level LCD.

Viewsonic VX500+

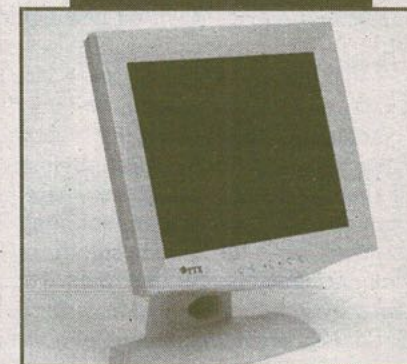
Size: 15-inch
Warranty: 3 years
Price: \$689
www.viewsonic.com

The VX500+ is a multimedia monitor, representing the top of the 15-inch Viewsonic line. It won't tilt nearly as far as the entry-level VE500, but offers your choice of digital or analogue signal inputs.

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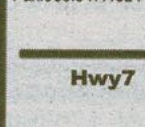
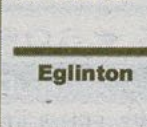
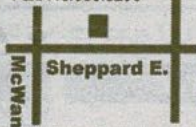
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Adventures in digital video: Making and breaking the rules

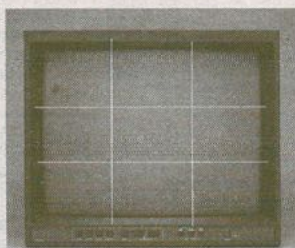
By LEE RICKWOOD

OK, so following rules and regulations may not be your definition of "creativity." You want to express your own vision, so why follow someone else? Rules are meant to be broken, right?

Yes, but you have to know them before you can blow them.

The Rule of Thirds is a case in point. This rule sets down guidelines for image composition, based on literally centuries of artistic – and mathematic – precedent. By understanding the rule, you can more easily create engaging imagery. By breaking it, the image becomes your own.

Imagine a superimposed grid on your video image, a tic-tac-toe board dividing the screen evenly into three rows, three columns, nine boxes (here, I've superimposed the grid over a professional monitor). Strong horizontal or vertical elements should be placed



along the lines. The intersection points – where the lines meet – are where you should place items of special visual interest. They are known as "hot spots" or "power points" in a composition.

These four focal points identify areas of balance and counter-balance, tension and release, in a composition. They help make use of what is called "negative space," the parts of a picture that do not hold key content, but are nevertheless important to the overall image.

The middle muddle

According to the Rule of Thirds, the focal points of an image are not in the

centre of the image. Completely centred shots are often boring, static and uneventful. "Bull's eye" shots are images with only one area of interest, smack-dab in the middle of the screen.

Thus, the Rule of Thirds is often in direct conflict

with your camcorder. The focus screen or safe title area markings in the camera viewfinder seem to force you to centre-up everything you shoot. Creatively speaking, with very few exceptions, the main subject of your image should never be at the centre of the image.

In a scenic shot, the horizon is often the strongest line we see. But when it runs right through the middle of the screen, the shot is boring. Lower the horizon to the bottom third of the screen, and the open sky of the upper portion of the image is more inviting to the eye. The composition beckons you to travel further into the picture.

Or think of a portrait shot on TV. Put the person in the middle of the frame, and you often get a small, insignificant looking person (due to the amount of space above their head, called "headroom"), or someone who looks lost in the frame (due to the even amount of space in front of and behind their head, known as "lead room").

Now, move that person's head to the

upper horizontal line; put their eyes at power point, facing into the open area of the screen. The placement looks and feels more natural.

Using the Rule of Thirds can help you make best use of headroom, lead room and eye lines.

Make your own rules

Many artists, designers and videographers do an exercise to help them learn, use and break the Rule of Thirds.

Compose a shot with a strong vertical element – it could be a tree in a park. Centre it in your first composition. Then, using the imaginary vertical lines on your viewfinder, place the tree to one side or the other. Which shot is more pleasing? Which one draws or moves your eye through the picture?

Try another shot, this time with a horizontal element – someone's face works very well in this test. Place their eyes centred near the top line and then again near the bottom line; note how the placement affects the significance of the face. ♦

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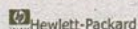
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- D-Link 10/100Mb Full-Duplex Network Adapter (PCI)
- Samsung 955DF 19" Digital 20hdp CRT Monitor, Flat
- Keytronic 104 Enhanced Soft-Touch Win 95 Keyboard
- Microsoft Wheel Mouse Optical Mouse w/ Mouse Pad
- MS Windows XP Home OEM w/ CD and Manual
- 5 Years Labour & 1 Year Parts Warranty

AMD Duron 1.3GHz	\$1769.99	or \$59/mth
AMD Athlon XP-1700+	\$1799.99	or \$60/mth
AMD Athlon XP-1800+	\$1814.99	or \$61/mth
AMD Athlon XP-2000+	\$1834.99	or \$61/mth
AMD Athlon XP-2100+	\$1854.99	or \$62/mth
AMD Athlon XP-2200+	\$1949.99	or \$65/mth
AMD Athlon XP-2400+	\$2004.99	or \$67/mth
AMD Athlon XP-2600+	\$2164.99	or \$72/mth
Intel Celeron 1.7GHz	\$1779.99	or \$59/mth
Intel Celeron 1.8GHz	\$1804.99	or \$60/mth
Intel Celeron 2.0GHz	\$1824.99	or \$61/mth
Intel Pentium 4-1.8GHz	\$1909.99	or \$64/mth
Intel Pentium 4-2.0A-512k	\$1944.99	or \$65/mth
Intel Pentium 4-2.4B-512k	\$1999.99	or \$67/mth
Intel Pentium 4-2.5B-512k	\$2064.99	or \$69/mth
Intel Pentium 4-2.6B-512k	\$2164.99	or \$72/mth
Intel Pentium 4-2.8B-512k	\$2299.99	or \$77/mth

PREMIER CHOICE PLATINUM

- Abit IT7-Max2 Motherboard w/ i845E Chipset for P4 or Abit AT7-Max2 Motherboard for AMD CPUs
- Thermaltake Volcano 7+ Heat Sink/Fan
- Panasonic 3.5" - 1.44MB HD Floppy Disk Drive
- 120Gb Ultra/100 Hard Disk Drive @ 7200RPM w/ 8Mb
- OCZ 512Mb DDR SDRAM PC3500 Memory
- Enemmax Mid-Tower ATX Case w/ 7 Bays
- Pentium 4 - 300W ATX Power Supply w/ 2 Fans
- 4-Ultra/133 Channels & 2-Serial ATA Channels
- 8-USB Ports and 4-1394 Firewire Ports
- ATI All-in-Wonder Radeon 9700Pro w/ 128Mb DDR
- Plextor 48x/24x/48x CR-RW Drive w/ Software
- Realtek ALC650 Audio w/ 6 Channel Support
- Creative Inspire 5.1 5300 w/ 5 Speakers & Subwoofer
- US Robotics 56K Internal Fax/Modem v.90 (Hardware)
- Realtek 8100B Interface for 10/100Mb Network Access
- Samsung 151S 15" LCD Monitor, 297mm
- Microsoft Internet Keyboard, USB w/ Internet Keys
- Microsoft IntelliMouse, USB w/ Mouse Pad
- Thermaltake Smart 80mm Street Case fan
- Arctic Silver III Thermal Heat Compound
- MS Windows XP Professional OEM w/ CD and Manual
- 5 Years Labour & 1 Year Parts Warranty

AMD Duron 1.3GHz	\$2999.99	or \$99/mth
AMD Athlon XP-1800+	\$3029.99	or \$99/mth
AMD Athlon XP-2000+	\$3044.99	or \$100/mth
AMD Athlon XP-2100+	\$3064.99	or \$100/mth
AMD Athlon XP-2200+	\$3084.99	or \$101/mth
AMD Athlon XP-2400+	\$3179.99	or \$104/mth
AMD Athlon XP-2600+	\$3234.99	or \$106/mth
Intel Celeron 1.7GHz	\$3394.99	or \$111/mth
Intel Celeron 1.8GHz	\$3064.99	or \$100/mth
Intel Celeron 2.0GHz	\$3084.99	or \$101/mth
Intel Pentium 4-2.0A-512k	\$3204.99	or \$105/mth
Intel Pentium 4-2.4B-512k	\$3259.99	or \$107/mth
Intel Pentium 4-2.5B-512k	\$3324.99	or \$109/mth
Intel Pentium 4-2.6B-512k	\$3424.99	or \$112/mth
Intel Pentium 4-2.8B-512k	\$3559.99	or \$116/mth

Premier CPUs & Memory

AMD Duron 950MHz @ 100/200MHz (Socket A)	see web
AMD Duron 1.3GHz @ 100/200MHz (Socket A)	see web
AMD Athlon XP-1700+ @ 266MHz (Socket A)	see web
AMD Athlon XP-1800+ @ 266MHz (Socket A)	see web
AMD Athlon XP-2000+ @ 266MHz (Socket A)	see web
AMD Athlon XP-2100+ @ 266MHz (Socket A)	see web
AMD Athlon XP-2200+ @ 266MHz (Socket A)	see web
AMD Athlon XP-2400+ @ 266MHz (Socket A)	see web
AMD Athlon XP-2600+ @ 333MHz (Socket A)	see web
Intel Celeron 1.7GHz (Socket 478) @ 400MHz	see web
Intel Celeron 1.8GHz (Socket 478) @ 400MHz	see web
Intel Celeron 2.0GHz (Socket 478) @ 400MHz	see web
Intel Pentium 4-1.6GHz (Socket 478)	see web
Intel Pentium 4-1.7GHz (Socket 478)	see web
Intel Pentium 4-1.8GHz (Socket 478)	see web
Intel Pentium 4-2.0GHz (Socket 478) 512k	see web
Intel Pentium 4-2.4GHz @ 533 Mhz (5478) 512k	see web
Intel Pentium 4-2.5GHz @ 533 Mhz (5478) 512k	see web
Intel Pentium 4-2.6GHz @ 533 Mhz (5478) 512k	see web
Intel Pentium 4-2.8GHz @ 533 Mhz (5478) 512k	see web

128 MB, SDRAM PC133MHz	see web
256 MB, SDRAM PC133MHz	see web
512 MB, SDRAM PC133MHz	see web
256 MB, SDRAM SDRAM PC2100 (266MHz)	see web
512 MB, SDRAM SDRAM PC2100 (266MHz)	see web
256 MB, SDRAM SDRAM PC2700 (333MHz)	see web
512 MB, SDRAM SDRAM PC2700 (333MHz)	see web
256 MB, SDRAM SDRAM PC3200 (400MHz)	see web
512 MB, SDRAM SDRAM PC3200 (400MHz)	see web
OCZ 256 MB, DDRAM SDRAM PC2700	see web
OCZ 256 MB, DDRAM SDRAM PC3200	see web
OCZ 512 MB, DDRAM SDRAM PC3200	see web
OCZ 512 MB, DDRAM SDRAM PC3500	see web
128 MB, Rambus, 164Pin, PC800 Non-ECC	see web
512 MB, Rambus, 164Pin, PC800 Non-ECC	see web
128 MB, Rambus, 164Pin, PC1066 Non-ECC	see web
256 MB, Rambus, 164Pin, PC1066 Non-ECC	see web
256 MB, Rimm, 232Pin, PC1066 Non-ECC	see web

Premier Hard Drives & Storage

40GB ATA/100 5400RPM EIDE Hard Drive	\$119.99
80GB ATA/100 5400RPM EIDE Hard Drive	\$134.99
40GB ATA/100 7200RPM EIDE Hard Drive	\$134.99
80GB ATA/100 7200RPM EIDE Hard Drive	\$149.99
80GB ATA/100 7200RPM EIDE Hard Drive	\$166.99
120GB ATA/100 7200RPM EIDE Hard Drive	\$244.99
WD 90GB ATA/100 7200RPM Hard Drive w/ 8MB	\$189.99
WD 120GB ATA/100 7200RPM Hard Drive w/ 8MB	\$279.99
WD 180GB ATA/100 7200RPM Hard Drive w/ 8MB	\$439.99
WD 180GB ATA/100 7200RPM Hard Drive w/ 8MB	\$499.99
WD 200GB ATA/100 7200RPM Hard Drive w/ 8MB	\$549.99
WD 200GB ATA/100 7200RPM Hard Drive w/ 8MB	\$599.99
Maxtor 160GB ATA/133 7200RPM Hard Drive w/ 8MB	\$494.99
Maxtor 200GB ATA/133 7200RPM Hard Drive w/ 8MB	\$599.99

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Premier Motherboards

Motherboards for AMD CPUs	
Abit AT7-Max2, Socket A, VIA KT400 (ATX) Non-Legacy	\$254.99
Abit KT7-333, Socket A, VIA KT333 (ATX) w/ w/ RAID	\$129.99/\$144.99
Abit KD7, Socket A, VIA KT400 (ATX) w/ w/ RAID	\$159.99/\$179.99
Abit KT533, Socket A, SIS745 (ATX)	\$109.99
Asus A7V8X, Socket A, KT400 (ATX) Serial ATA	\$189.99
Asus A7N8X-DX, Socket A, nForce2 (ATX) Serial ATA	\$214.99
ECS K7SSA, Socket A, SIS 745 Chipset w/ LAN & Sound	\$94.99
ECS K7SEM-266, Socket A (M-ATX) w/ Video, Sound & LAN	\$94.99
Motherboards for Intel CPUs	
Abit BD7-II, Socket 478, Intel i845E (ATX) w/ w/ RAID	\$139.99/\$159.99
Abit BE7, Socket 478, Intel i845E (ATX) w/ w/ RAID	\$164.99/\$189.99
Abit BD7, Socket 478, Intel i845E (ATX) w/ On-Board Video	\$149.99
Abit IT7-Max2, Socket 478, Intel i845E (ATX) Non-Legacy	\$264.99
Asus P40X8, Socket 478, Intel E720S Chipset (ATX)	see web
Asus PAPE-LAN, Socket 478, Intel i845E Chipset (ATX)	\$189.99
Asus PAPE-GBL/SATA1594, Socket 478, Intel i845E Chipset (ATX)	\$234.99
Asus P4553, Socket 478, SIS 645 Chipset (ATX) Serial ATA	\$149.99
Asus P4553-C, Socket 478, Intel i850E Chipset (ATX)	\$239.99
ECS P4553-DX, Socket 478, SIS 645 Chipset w/ LAN & Sound	\$99.99
ECS P4553-DX, Socket 478, SIS 645 Chipset w/ Video, Sound & LAN	\$109.99
PC Chips M755, Socket 478 (M-ATX) w/ Video, Sound & LAN	\$89.99
Tyan S1554, FC-PGA & Slot 1, Via 133 Chipset (ATX)	\$149.99

Full List of Motherboards available on our Website

Premier Video Cards

Asus v8170/DDR GeForce 4 MX440 64MB DDR TV-Out	\$119.99
Asus v8420 GeForce 4 Ti4200 w/ 128MB DDR Deluxe	\$314.99
Asus v9180/DDR GeForce 4 MX440-64 64MB DDR TV-Out	\$159.99
Asus v9180/Suite GeForce 4 MX440-64 64MB DDR VIVO	\$159.99
Asus v9280/DDR GeForce 4 Ti4200-64 w/ 128MB DDR	\$274.99
ATI Xpert 2000 Pro w/ 32MB SDRAM AGP	\$49.99
ATI Radeon 7500 w/ 64MB SDRAM AGP w/ Video Out	\$59.99
ATI Radeon 9000 w/ 64MB DDR AGP w/ Video Out	\$109.99
ATI Radeon 9000 w/ 128MB DDR AGP w/ Video Out	\$134.99
ATI Radeon 9000Pro w/ 64MB DDR AGP w/ Video Out	\$139.99
ATI Radeon 9500Pro w/ 128MB DDR AGP w/ Video Out	\$159.99
ATI Radeon 9700Pro w/ 128MB DDR AGP w/ Video Out	\$199.99
ATI All-in-Wonder Radeon 7500 w/ 64MB AGP DDR	\$169.99
ATI All-in-Wonder Radeon 8500DV w/ 64MB AGP DDR	\$259.99
ATI All-in-Wonder Radeon 9700Pro w/ 128MB AGP DDR	\$264.99
Leadtek WinFast GeForce 4250 LE TD w/ 128MB VIVO	\$224.99
Leadtek WinFast GeForce 4250 Ultra TD w/ 128MB	\$244.99

Full List of Video Cards Available Online

Premier Fax Modems

56K Int. (v.30) AMR	\$14.99
Rockwell 56K Int. w/ Voice (v.90) PCI	\$19.99
US Robotics 56K Int. PCI WinModem	\$29.99
US Robotics 56K Int. PCI Hardware	\$79.99

Premier Soundcards & Speakers

SoundBlaster PCI 128	\$29.99
SoundBlaster LIVE Value 5.1	\$49.99
SoundBlaster Audigy Value	\$94.99
SoundBlaster Audigy 2 Platinum	\$184.99
SoundBlaster Audigy 2 Platinum	\$274.99
SoundBlaster X-Fi	\$214.99
Altec Lansing AV-200 w/ 2 Speakers	\$24.99
Altec Lansing AV-300 w/ 2 Speakers & Subwoofer	\$39.99
Altec Lansing AV-500 w/ 4 Speakers & Subwoofer	\$64.99
Creative Inspire 4.1 4400 w/ 4 Speakers & Subwoofer	\$84.99
Creative Inspire 5.1 5200 w/ 5 Speakers & Subwoofer	\$109.99
Creative Inspire 5.1 6600 w/ 6 Speakers & Subwoofer	\$164.99
Creative Inspire 5.1 Digital 5700 w/ 5 Speakers & Subwoofer	\$294.99

Premier CD/DVD-ROM & RW Drives

Sony 52X CD-ROM Drives (7.8MB/Sec)	\$34.99
Sony 52X/48X DVD-ROM Drives (Beige)	\$64.99
Samsung 16X DVD-ROM Drive (Black)	\$74.99
Full List of Drives Available Online	
Plextor Plextor CD-R/Re-Writer (48x/24x/48x)	\$164.99
Panasonic CD-R/Re-Writer w/ Burn-Proof (40x/12x/40x)	\$99.99
Samsung CD-R/Re-Writer w/ Burn-Proof (40x/12x/48x) (Black)	\$114.99
Sony CD-R/Re-Writer w/ Burn-Proof (40x/12x/48x) (Beige)	\$84.99
Sony CD-R/Re-Writer w/ Burn-Proof (40x/12x/48x) (Black)	\$89.99
Yamaha CD-R/Re-Writer w/ Burn-Proof (40x/12x/48x) TQ2 Top	\$174.99
Samsung Combo Drive (32x/16x/40x/12x)	\$129.99
Pioneer DVR-A05 (DVD-R/RW & CD-R/RW)	\$149.99

Premier Networks

Smartlink 10/100Mbps Ethernet Card	\$14.99
D-Link 10/100Mbps Ethernet Card	\$19.99
3COM 10/100Mbps Ethernet Card w/ Wake on Lan	\$49.99
Linksys 10/100 Ethernet USB Adapter	\$29.99
Linksys WMP11 - 602.11b Wireless Adapter PCI	\$114.99
Linksys WMP11 - 602.11b Wireless Adapter PCMCIA	\$99.99
Linksys WUSB11 - 602.11b Wireless Adapter USB	\$99.99
Cables, Ends and Adapters are also available	
Smartlink 10/100Mbps, 5 Port Hub	\$84.99
Linksys BEFSR11 Cable/DSL Router - 1 Port	\$89.99
Linksys BEFSR11 Cable/DSL Router - 4 Port	\$104.99
Linksys BEFW1154 Wireless Cable/DSL Router - 4 Port	\$169.99
SMC Barracuda Cable/DSL Router - 4 Port	\$114.99

Premier Cooling Supplies

OCZ Goliath 2 SE Heat Sink & Fan	\$44.99
Thermaltake Volcano 6 CU / CU	\$14.99/\$14.99
Thermaltake Volcano 7 / 7+ w/ Variable 80mm Fan	\$24.99/\$44.99
Thermaltake Volcano 9 / 9+ w/ Variable 80mm Fan	\$29.99
Thermaltake 60mm Case Fan / 60mm Case Fan	\$9.99/\$9.99
Ventec Stealth 80mm Case Fan	\$19.99
80mm Case Fans w/ Blue/Red LEDs or 4-Color LEDs	\$19.99
Arctic Silver III Thermal Paste	\$9.99
Removable Hard Drive Rack w/ Fans	\$24.99

Full List of Cooling Supplies Available Online

Premier Cases

Enlight Desktop Tower Case w/ 7 Bays (ATX) 300W	\$64
Enlight Mid Tower Case w/ 7 Bays (ATX) 300W	\$59
Enlight Mid Tower Case w/ 7 Bays (ATX) 300W	\$59
Enformax CS-3000 Case w/ 6 Bays (ATX) 300W	\$89
Enlight Mid Tower Case w/ 7 Bays (ATX) 300W	\$59
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Musical Odyssey: Recording the bass guitar

By NESTOR GULA

If recording music was easy, everybody would be doing it. Every instrument and sound that you record presents a unique set of problems. Recording bass guitar is no exception. Most recording engineers will agree that bass guitar is one of the hardest instruments to record. I remember hearing that Tina Weymouth, bassist for Talking Heads, spent a solid week in a studio just working on getting the bass sound right. Now that is obsessing a little much for the right sound, but then again, great sound is what you want when you are recording.

To make life a bit simpler here, I will only be talking about solid body electric basses, like the Fender Precision.

Similar to recording an electric guitar, there are two main methods of recording an electric bass: Direct into your

mixing board/computer, or by playing through your bass amplifier and micing that.

An important step to remember is to tune your bass guitar before laying down any tracks. Usually you lay the drums and bass down first when building a song on your computer or multi-track tape recorder. If you start with a bass that is out of tune, say half a tone down across the strings, the work that you did is useless.

Big low down sound

Placing a microphone up to your amplifier seems to be a very obvious way to get the sound you want. After all, you already have, or at least should have, the right sound using your bass and amp. The biggest problem with mic'ing the bass amp is the volume. Amps sound best near maximum volume. Bass

amps near maximum volume will make everything in your house shake — the glasses, the china, the tables, the chairs and even your teeth. The next problem is that you need a good microphone to pick up the bass sound. A standard dynamic vocal microphone might not work well because most of these have a low-frequency rolloff built in that compensates for the proximity effect. In most cases, the low end of the sound will lose strength, which is not what you want. You can avoid some of this drop-off by putting the mic right up against the speaker grille. Some general-purpose dynamic mics don't have the low-frequency filter and can be used as a substitute. Since bass amps tend to vibrate a lot, you will probably have to shock-proof your microphone. The process will require a lot of trial-and-error experimentation, but the end result, a great bass sound, will be worth it.

Direct sound

The most common way to record a bass guitar is to plug the instrument directly into the board. However, this is not as simple as it may first appear. If you plug your bass directly into your

mixing board or computer, you might get a terrible sound because of an impedance mismatch between the bass pickups and the recording device. If your bass has active pickups — pickups that are powered by an onboard battery — you might not run into this problem. Otherwise, the proper way to go direct with your bass is to get a DI (direct input) box. You plug your bass into the box and the box into your mixer or computer.

A DI box is not a guarantee of a good sound. You still have to tweak the sound, using equalization and compression, to get it just right. I found that using several of my guitar's effects pedals produced interesting and usable bass sounds. I would combine an overdrive pedal, set at a minimum of overdrive, with an equalizer and sometimes a phaser or flanger in the mix. Ever since I've acquired an amp/speaker emulator for my guitar, I have been using it for my bass and getting fair results. The emulators made especially for bass give predictably really good results, but using the one made for guitar can also give you a great bass sound — although you are quite limited in choice. ♦

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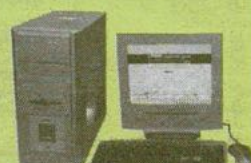
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Fujifilm 3800 ushers in the xD era

By NESTOR GULA

As digital cameras evolve, so do the memory cards that store the digital images. The xD memory card is a new player in the field. Developed jointly by Fujifilm and Olympus, the xD (extreme Digital) card is small, roughly 2x2.5x0.2 cm, and initially comes in capacities ranging from 16 MB to 128 MB. Eventually, the capacity of these cards is supposed to reach up to 8 GB.

The Fujifilm FinePix 3800 comes with a 16 MB xD card. Given that this camera has a maximum resolution of 3.2 megapixels, the card would hold only 12 of these high-resolution pictures. I realize that the camera manufacturers are able to keep camera prices down by offering minimal storage capacity, but I would dearly love to see them give the consumer the power to choose the size of memory for their needs. I really wanted a larger amount of memory for this camera because it took really good pictures.

For the \$699 price, the FinePix 3800 has a lot to offer: a 6x optical zoom; a pop-up flash; four shooting modes (automatic, manual, movie and scene,

which offers settings for nighttime, sport, scenic, portrait and continuous shots); a shutter button with AF/AE lock; five flash modes (Auto, Red-eye reduction, Red-eye reduction with slow synchro, Forced flash and Slow synchro); and the ability to attach a 30-second voice note to each photo. Based on the FinePix 2800, the 3800 is a compact camera, at 10x7.7x6.9 cm (3.9x3.0x2.7 in.). People with big hands might find it awkward to use at first because of its small size and radically curved handgrip.

Although compact in size, the FinePix 3800 is very easy to use because of the way Fujifilm has set up its menu system. This system is similar to the one the company uses on most of its consumer digital cameras. All but two of the controls are accessible with the right thumb. The two that aren't are the button that switches between the electronic viewfinder and screen, and the button that activates the pop-up flash.

The way the pop-up flash works is very good. When stored, it will not self engage. When open, it will flash accord-



ing to one of the five settings, which you can scroll through using one button on the back of the camera. This takes a bit of getting used to, but it is a very nice feature.

The only complaint I have with this camera is that it lacks an optical viewfinder, offering only an electronic viewfinder. With the press of a button, users can switch to the 1.8-inch LCD

screen. Using an electronic viewfinder not only drains battery power, provided here by four AA batteries, but also makes photography difficult in certain cases. When taking photos at night, for instance, the screen was usually black, save for the information letters and logos. I had to point in the general direction of what I wanted to photograph and hope for the best. The photos came out OK, but there was a lot of trial-and-error work to do.

The FinePix 3800 is a reasonably priced quality camera aimed at the discerning amateur photographer. It gives a lot of easy-to-use control to the photographer, without having a complicated

interface. ♦

more INFO

FinePix 3800
\$699
Fujifilm
www.fujifilm.ca

Tested: RCA Lyra

By ANDREW MOORE-CRISPIN

The RCA Lyra Personal Digital Player looks like a nice advanced little MP3 player, though looks can be deceiving.

The Lyra is best suited to those with little computer knowledge, who just want the thing to work as it should without having to worry about actually doing anything.

However, it's likely priced beyond what such users would be willing to pay, and more advanced users would be advised to look somewhere else.

The Lyra Personal Digital Player is priced below most MP3 players with 128 MB of internal memory, though the strikes against it might make other more expensive MP3 players more attractive.

The core problem with this player is that it uses a proprietary music format called MPY, which can only be put on the device through the included limited version of *MusicMatch Jukebox* software; no drag-and-drop here, despite the fact that the Lyra is recognized as a removable storage drive in Windows.

MusicMatch Jukebox is adware, and

reminds users at every possible opportunity to upgrade to *Musicmatch Jukebox Plus*. The upgrade costs US\$19.99, and makes the software more functional, though allowing for a simple drag-and-drop interface would at least not alienate more advanced users. Without said upgrade, ripping is painfully slow.

Dragging MP3 or WMA (Windows Media Audio) directly on to the player will result in a garbled mess in playback, despite the fact that the documentation says the player supports these file types. Instead, users must convert the files through the trial version of *Jukebox* before being able to download them to the player. Once users go through this process, the Lyra functions well in playback.

There is a multi-function thumbstick in the centre of the control panel, making navigation through files relatively quick and easy. However, the thumbstick can also be pressed in, which functions as the enter command. Pressing the stick



in without also moving it up or down takes some getting used to.

The unit itself comes with 128 MB of internal storage, enough to store about 128 minutes of audio.

Users can choose the sequence in which tracks will be played, though they can't subdivide them into folders or play lists. However, with the addition of an SD card or MultiMediaCard expansion module, which fits in the top of the unit, users can decide from which storage media the device plays.

The built in FM radio is a nice feature, and allows users to set 10 stations to memory.

Also, instead of using an analogue volume control dial, the Lyra incorporates a rocker arm on the left side of the unit, which sets the digital volume control in increments of one from zero to

more INFO

Lyra Personal Digital Player
\$249
RCA
www.rca.ca

50.

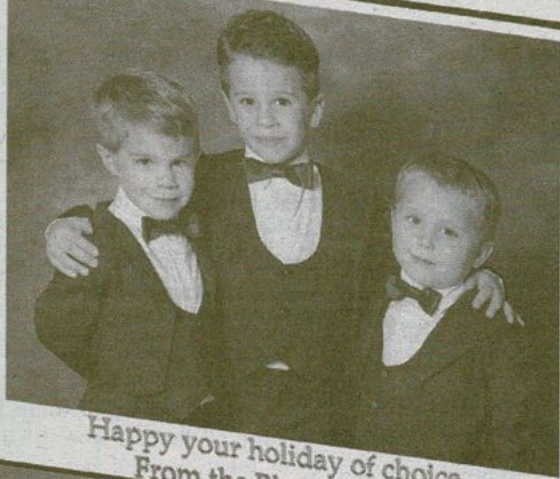
Users also have access to five preset EQ settings: Flat, bass, pop, rock and jazz, or can select tone and change the bass and treble independently, from zero to 10.

The Lyra is very small and looks like it was designed for athletes. All the buttons on the front of the unit are behind a rubber cover, which looks to be water resistant, though the thumbstick is an obvious chink in the armour. It can stand up to being bumped around without missing a beat, as it uses a non-moving storage media.

The Lyra looks and feels like a durable little unit that could stand up to the rigors of everyday use.

Once users get over feeling cheated by the proprietary MPY format and the constant reminders to upgrade the *Jukebox* software, the Lyra Personal Digital Player is a functional MP3 player with some nice features. Also, for \$249.99, it is priced below most other MP3 players in its class. ♦

To our friends and family,



Happy your holiday of choice
From the Blank family

Digital Shots: Gifts from the digital darkroom

By ANDREW MOORE-CRISPIN

Your digital darkroom opens up some good opportunities for thoughtful yet inexpensive holiday gifts. Existing pictures of you and yours in greeting card form make a thoughtful gift that should make someone on your list smile. What's more, they can make it look like you spent a lot of time and effort putting these cards together when in actuality, it's a simple and fun project for the budding digital darkroom user.

First things first

The first step is a fairly obvious one; take a picture. Choosing the type of photo is where things become just a little bit more complicated. Do you want a standard family picture, a picture of the family engaging in wintertime fun or perhaps a Christmas picture of the family in front of the tree? The static family portrait style shot will do the job, but try experimenting to come up with something a little bit more interesting. Anything that is a good picture will make a good card. As always, experimentation and your own personal style are key.

Greeting cards

Gather up the family, snap a few pictures, pick out the best one and put it on the front of a card for a unique holiday greeting. Many paper manufacturers (Epson, HP and Lexmark among them) have card stock specifically designed for creating greeting cards on your photo printer. Also, many simple image editing software suites like

Microsoft's *Picture It*, *PrintableExpressions* from HP and *Adobe Photo Deluxe* (a simple image editing suite, often bundled with digital cameras and scanners) all have wizards to make creating a greeting card easy. If you're not using a wizard, bear in mind how the card will be folded and orient page elements accordingly. It might be a good idea to fold an 8.5x11-inch sheet in quarters as a mock up and pencil in the details to avoid mistakes. Creating a card without using a wizard offers more flexibility, and is a fairly simple process with a little pre-planning. More advanced image editing software will allow you to set guides on an image that will not show up when printing. If your image editing software is so equipped, divide the page into four equal parts, with the bottom-left quadrant being the inside of the card, where the personalized message goes; the top-right being the front and the top-left being the back. Remember to rotate the inside elements 180 degrees when you're finished designing it, otherwise your card will appear upside down.

When designing a holiday greeting card from a favourite family photo or snap shot, it is important to remember that less is more. Experiment to see what your image editing software is capable of, but remember that recipients (especially relatives) will be more interested in the picture than in your design skills. Just the photo with a simple border and holiday message will suffice; avoid the temptation to put a digital Santa hat on the family dog and steer clear of

continued on page 43

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Attention: Read before clicking



Do you ever read licence agreements? Most people of my acquaintance would say they do not. The agreements are viewed as just one more mouse click between the user and running software. The only answer that matters is "I Agree" – anything else, and the installation exits summarily. The fact that they may be agreeing to the sacrifice of their first-born child, or to submit to unnamed electronic indignities doesn't cross their minds. But that may have to change.

Why? Because of a sneaky Panamanian purveyor of junk e-mails called Permitted Media. It has figured out how to get users to agree to activity that would ordinarily be considered the product of a worm or a virus. They do the deed through a licence agreement.

Here's how it works. You get an e-mail telling you that someone has sent you an electronic greeting card. It includes a link to a Web site, which, when clicked, initiates the download of a piece of software. You're told it is necessary so you can view the greeting.

Sounds pretty benign, doesn't it?

As part of the installation, you're asked to accept two end-user agreements. Embedded in them is text granting permission for the company to access your Outlook contact list and send e-mails to everyone in it. Agree to these terms and, congratulations, you have just been suckered into turning what's basically a virus into a "legal" program.

Brilliant Digital Entertainment pulled a similar stunt with the agreement (tucked into Kazaa's licence, since Brilliant's product was bundled with it) for its 3D ad technology. Buried in the wording was a clause allowing Brilliant to appropriate "unused computing power and space" on the user's PC. Its plan was to sell this power to companies using grid computing to handle large computational problems.

Even mainstream software companies aren't above slithering sneaky terms and conditions into their licences. Read a few – they're highly educational. Did you know, for example, that you may have granted a vendor permission to

electronically check your PC's software at its discretion, by accepting the licences to specific patches?

Licences aren't getting any less intrusive, either. In the name of the protection of intellectual and copyrighted property, vendors are working very hard to gain snooping rights on all of our computers. And, of course, to keep things legal, they have to somehow get us to agree to this invasion of our privacy.

If I sound a bit cranky about this, it's because I'm tired of being presumed guilty of all manner of piracy by parties with vested interests, without due process, and without recourse. One prime example: The blank CD levy (currently \$0.21 per disc) is being charged because, according to the Canadian Private Copying Collective (CPCC), "everyone" pirates music (oh, really?). So everyone buying blank recordable media has been declared guilty and is being fined, even if the only thing to be recorded on the disc is data.

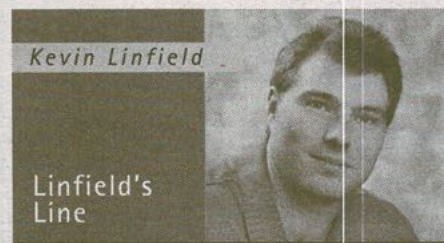
However, that is another, ongoing tale. Today we're talking licence agreements. Agreements that we can no longer afford to simply dismiss with a click on the "I Agree" button. We have to wade through the torturous legalese, understand it and be sufficiently strong-minded to decline the agreement and return the product if the terms are offensive.

If they really want to help, vendors need to clarify that horrendous language and make their agreements simpler. And they need to stop slipping in cunning little clauses that strip users of all rights.

Don't get me wrong – I'm very much in favour of protecting intellectual property. I believe users should respect publishers' rights, but I also believe that publishers should respect their users. Companies like Permitted and Brilliant, who sneakily get people to agree to offensive or deceptive licence terms are betraying the trust users have placed in them.

The industry needs to police itself and combat activities like this, before governments or the courts do it their way. It's in the industry's best interest – users who are maltreated are unlikely to respect the rights of those who abuse them. And users need to do their part, by paying attention to the agreements they're asked to approve, and making their displeasure known by choosing other products, like open source, or products licensed under fairer terms. ♦

I do not agree . . .



A submitter on the Internet news site Slashdot nominated American Airlines for the "longest website end user agreement." Their AAdvantage Enrollment terms and conditions at www.aa.com/apps/AAdvantage/InstantEnrollment.jhtml weighs in at 181 paragraphs, 3,482 words, or 22,411 characters. Although it is fairly easy to find user agreements much longer than this (see PayPal.com), it got me thinking – does anyone actually read an entire end user agreement from start to finish? And even if you did, could you realistically agree 100 per cent to everything included?

I am not a lawyer

Most users (myself included) rarely read an entire Internet Web site agreement. We generally assume that it contains clauses that prevent us from suing and that "standard" disclaimers apply. But in some circumstances, blanket disclaimer statements could result in grief. What happens if your credit card number was accidentally made available? What about malice on the company's part, resulting in spyware, viruses or simply gathering your personal information and selling it? I often wonder if these types of agreements could hold up in a Canadian court. Simply clicking on the "I agree" button is not the same as signing a contract – since when are you bound to an agreement by just reading it? For example, part of the clause on American Airlines' site states "if you do not intend to be legally bound by these terms and conditions, do not access and use the site." So does this mean that I can't access their Web site to read this agreement if I'm not going to agree with it?

Another example

Let us not be too hard on American Airlines. If you take advantage of online auctions, you've probably come into contact with the PayPal service. I'm sure that many *Toronto Computes!* readers have one of these accounts, as it makes life so much easier buying things through eBay or from individuals on the Internet. But before you signed up did you actually read the entire end user

agreement, which contains 2,141 lines of 18,928 words? That's about 38 printed pages! Did you actually agree to everything? Probably not.

Commercial software

It is often difficult to read the user agreement on retail software before you spend your hard-earned money. Have you ever purchased a piece of retail software, opened the box, read the user agreement and then refused to abide by it? What do you do then? I think you would be out of luck if you tried to return it to the store you purchased it from as most (all?) stores have a strict policy of not accepting returns on opened software. You could try calling the company and telling them you do not agree to the licensing terms, but odds are against getting your money back. I've only heard of one success story: A few years ago a Linux advocate fought to get a Windows refund because he didn't agree with the terms and conditions. To make a long story short, he got his money back – but from the computer manufacturer, not Microsoft (see www.netcraft.com.au/geoffrey/toshiba.html for details).

Privacy policies

When you read a company's privacy policy, have you ever noticed that, in general, it is taking away rights instead of giving them to you? Certain clauses may be draconian to us soft-spoken Canadians, but in today's age of blame I can understand that companies are required to cover their backsides.

Your assignment

Your homework, should you choose to accept it, is to take a look at end user agreements and privacy policies. Avoid the temptation to simply click on the "I Agree" button and actually read what rights you are giving up to use software or access a Web site. If you want some good legalese, check out any financial Web site. I'm sure they have kept many lawyers employed writing those. Feel free to send the best to linfield@rocketmail.com.

Final thoughts

Of course, users do have a choice. Simply click on the "I do not agree" button, or go to a different (possibly a competitor's) site. Hopefully at least one will have a sane policy, but personally, I doubt it.

E-mail can be sent to linfield@rocketmail.com. ♦



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REVIEWS

Strydent InkSaver

By ALAN ZISMAN

Early in the 20th century, King Gillette established his company's name and market share by selling razors cheap. He made his company's fortune selling the replacement blades.

Printers seem to get cheaper and cheaper to buy, selling for as little as \$79 or so. But all that means is that when it's time to replace the ink cartridges, you can easily end up paying more for a set of ink cartridges than you did for your printer.

Sales of replacement ink cartridges total over \$17 billion a year; Hewlett-Packard's ink cartridge sales equal that company's profits. Consumers looking for savings on ink have generated \$3 billion worth of sales of no-name brand cartridges and refillable kits.

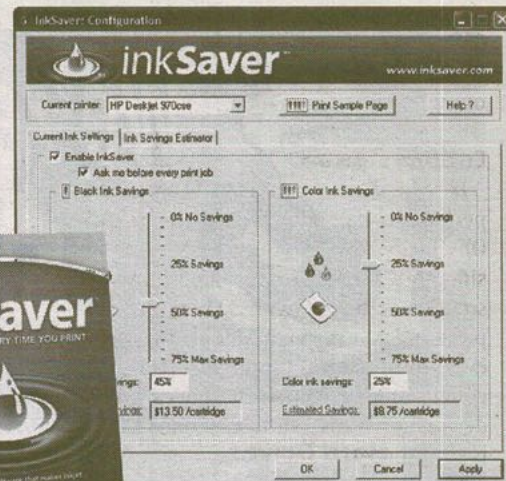
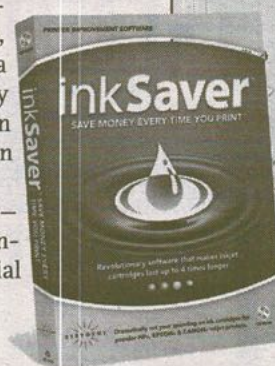
If you're unhappy with an ink-guzzling printer, Strydent Software can help. The 35-person Burnaby, B.C.-based company offers a \$52 (about the cost of one ink cartridge) InkSaver utility, which works with the printer drivers of many (but not all - check the company Web site to see if your printer is supported) popular printer models, to allow users to fine-tune their printer's ink consumption.

By default, most printers let users choose between standard (and in some cases high) and draft mode, saving on ink but also resulting in noticeably poorer print quality. The InkSaver installer prints out a test page, showing the effect of different levels of ink use for both text and graphics. Users can pick the levels they prefer, separately for the black and colour cartridges. The program allows users to either confirm the ink settings for each print job, or to set them once and forget about them. A clever calculator built into the dialogue box shows how much money is saved on ink costs.

Obviously, putting less ink on a page will be noticeable, but I found that on my text-heavy print-outs, settings saving 25 to 40 per cent of the ink were

hard to distinguish from pages printed with no ink-reduction. Photo printing, however, showed a noticeable loss of quality with anything more than a minimal reduction in ink use.

Test it for yourself - Strydent offers a downloadable 15-day free trial version. ♦



It's in the cards: Scribe software

By HAROLD LASS

In ancient times, when faced with a mountain of research for a mega-paper, I'd split the shrink wrap on a package of 3x5-inch index cards and head for the campus library. After scrawling the title and publication details at the top of the card for each source, I'd summarize or quote pertinent parts of the text and move on to the next one and the next card.

Actually, this first step was easier than what followed. I'd end up with a stack of cards, crammed with hours of meticulous research. The trick to the second step, however, was to sort through all that stuff to find what I needed when I needed it. That was then.

This is now - Scribe (chnm.gmu.edu/tools/scribe). Not often does a freebie come along that astounds, but Scribe does just that. This powerful tool won't replace the first step. You still have to collect and interpret the research data and produce a result. That's called learning. Speaking of which, it can't eliminate plagiarism either - i.e., failure to credit others' research and recorded interpretations. That's called cheating and can result in severe penalties.

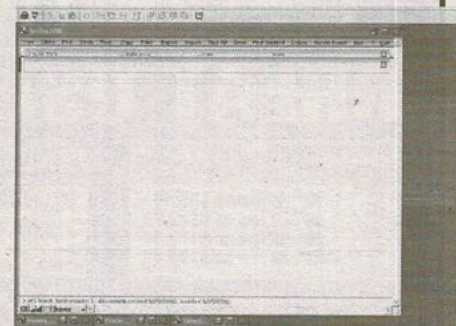
But Scribe sure facilitates the second step. Scribe is a database program, but not your run-of-the-mill one. Even though it was originally developed for history students, it can be used for any subject area. Here's some of what it can do:

- Your hours of research will no doubt result in summaries and notes. Scribe

can store up to 64,000 characters for each virtual "research card" you create.

- No need to spend tedious time creating your bibliographies, because Scribe will help you create them with ease.
- Any information you've collected about the authors you've cited can be stored and retrieved.
- Need a glossary? Scribe will help you create one.
- It will even create an outline of your paper and link the information in the outline to your cards.

But the real payoff is the program's ability to search and find. Can't



remember on which card you recorded that crucial fact? Enter a key word and let Scribe do its thing. The program will even search by author and title.

The Scribe Web site offers some other useful research tools as well: Poll Builder creates multiple choice questions, Web Scrapbook collects collaborative research clippings (you have to register to participate - it's free) and Survey Builder creates Web surveys.

So tool up and get scribing. ♦

more INFO

InkSaver
US\$35 (about CDN\$52)
Strydent Software
www.strydent.com

Requirements:
Windows 98/ME/2000/XP
20 MB available hard drive space

List of compatible printers is available on the Web site.

Gifts from the digital darkroom

continued from page 39

overly ornate fonts as well as filters.

Creating a calendar

If you can't choose just one image, perhaps a calendar would be in order. Obviously, this is going to require considerably more work and perhaps even some specific software. There are complete packages available that include everything; spiral bindings, clear plastic covers and of course the paper and the design software. Photo Calendar Kit Plus is one such kit, and makes a simple cal-

endar using *Print Shop 6.0*. It is possible to create a calendar without using a template, but it would be an involved and likely frustrating experience.

Choosing a theme for your calendar is important. The theme can be as simple as using a series of family snapshots or anything else that comes to mind. For example, you could create a calendar using photographs of points of interest in the city, nature pictures, nighttime shots (discussed in last month's Digital Shots, which is archived on CanadaComputes.com) or anything else that captures your interest.

Once you've found a common theme for the pictures to be featured in your calendar, matching images with the appropriate month and season will give the finished product a more polished feel. Unless you're a real shutterbug, it might be hard to come by 12 images that fit under a common theme, so perhaps rather than putting together a calendar for 2003, we should think ahead to 2004.

Planning ahead for a seasonal photo calendar for 2004 is a perfect reason to go out on a monthly photography field trip. Practice and experimentation are

key in honing your craft and developing a personal style.

There are other options for gifts from the digital darkroom. Many manufacturers offer t-shirt iron-on transfer paper (remember to print the image backwards to get the right results) and there is paper designed to put your pictures on a mug (same caveat applies). Perhaps not the ideal gift for a teenaged son or daughter (especially not the t-shirt emblazoned with a family photo), but grandparents might like to show off a picture of their grandchildren on a shirt, as opposed to in a wallet. ♦

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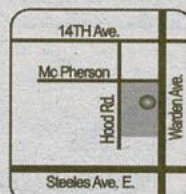
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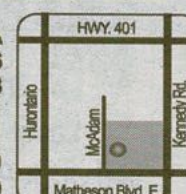
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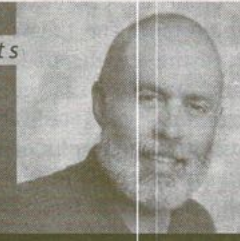
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COLUMNS

Unchained melodies?

Alan Thwait's

The
World
Is My
Cubicle



The vision is so appealing, and so very 21st century, too ...

A year or so ago, the buzz was all about how the wireless Web was going to transform the Net, and therefore irrevocably change the way we live, work and play. As is so often the case though, buzz soon settled down into dull old reality, and the 21st century still feels a lot like the 20th. The promise of technology is there, but the content is much the same as it was. There's a little more dazzle, maybe, but ...

Consider the promise of mobile, wireless Web access.

When Phone.com, Ericsson, Nokia and Motorola founded the WAP (Wireless Application Protocol) Forum in June 1997, their plan was to offer a licence-free standard that would allow wireless devices, with their limited screens and connection speeds, to access Internet and intranet applications.

To be fair, WAP has met its goals, and then some. WAP works with all major wireless networks, including CDMA, GSM, TDMA and CDPD, over a multitude of networks (circuit-switched, packet or Simple Messaging Service), and can be built on any operating system, including Windows CE, Palm OS, EPOC and JavaOS.

The result is that we can use our Web-enabled cell phones to access stock quotes, news headlines, weather reports, sports scores, lottery numbers, airline schedules and Net-based directories of phone numbers and addresses. Games? Online, cell phone-based gaming is the cutting edge, according to industry analysts and media honchos.

Now let's go from buzz to reality.

The wireless Web has turned out to be somewhat less than the promised Second Coming. The equipment is hard to figure out. Connections keep getting cut. Tiny cell phone screens make Web surfing frustrating. Once-free services suddenly cost money. And you still need those pesky wires to charge the darned things. Some business travelers find it useful, but most North Americans have yet to conclude that the wireless Web is anything but costly, complex and downright useless.

It's worth stating the obvious. Cell

phones are great for talking. A dull, old-fashioned truth, but, just the same, the truth. We like being able to pick up a phone wherever we are - in the car, in the supermarket, maybe even at the movies or in a public library. A recent wireless industry report suggests that there are more than seven mobile phones for every 10 people in the world's developed countries. But punching those little keys so we can read data on a screen smaller than a credit card? It just ain't the same, it seems.

The problem with cell phones lies partly in what makes them so darn appealing. They're small. The smaller, the more appealing they are to consumers, it seems. Give me something small, light and attractively packaged, says Joe Customer, and I'll gladly pay for it. In fact, he usually adds, I can be counted on to trade up to something smaller, lighter and even flashier before the old unit wears out. (It seems Japanese cell phone enthusiasts go for a new model every three months or so. The fashion-conscious on this side of the Pacific are said to be in an 18 month use/re-use cycle.) But a smaller form factor means tinier keys and a smaller screen. And that means that Joe Customer is going to find it even harder to type messages, navigate the latest game or browse a Web site.

The coming solution to this dilemma is likely to lie in slightly larger cell phones than the leading-edge crop we're seeing now. If voice-to-text translation software advances as has been promised, that, too, will be a boost to the wireless industry. The arrival of fully-capable 3G wireless networks on these shores will make a huge difference to connection speeds. Until then though, cell phone users are stuck with low-speed access.

In the meantime, cell phone users hungry for bells and whistles can do what so many of their fellow believers are doing. Download a favourite ring tone (provided that your service offers them - some don't) and annoy everyone in earshot with a digitized version of "We Will Rock You." Or go to one of the cell phone accessory stalls that seem to be in every shopping mall, and transform your humdrum, everyday cell phone into a winking, blinking, club scene-ready personal communication device. Chances are, though, all you'll be doing with it for some time to come is talking.

Alan Thwait's, a *TC!* Contributing Editor, is a freelance journalist who writes about computer, communications, and business technologies. He can be reached at praxis@pathcom.com.

Jaguar: 10.2 or not to?



It's been almost five months since the release of Jaguar. How are you getting along?

When Jaguar was unleashed back in August, there seemed to be two camps emerging: Camp A saw the new world of Mac only getting better; Camp B saw a new Mac trying for a cash grab from loyalists to the company. After all, as far as naming software goes, when the numbers increase to the right of the decimal point, the new version is considered an upgrade to the existing software. Apple, and Camp A, didn't see it that way. Version 10.2 was touted a major upgrade to the new OS X software, but Apple wants to keep the X brand around a bit longer, since it was (is) still a relatively new OS. By saying that the incremental version increase was meant to keep the X name while fully overhauling the OS, the company justifies its decision to charge full price and not offer an upgrade price (unless you bought OS X 10.1 less than a month before 10.2).

Needless to say, there has been active discussion on both sides of the coin.

Okay - enough with the intangibles. What's the real deal?

Last year, you finally had the discretionary money to purchase Mac OS X 10.1. You cleared your schedule, cleared your desk and put the CD in your computer. When the install was complete, you were looking at a new computer. In fact, you almost had to relearn your way around the Mac. That was where I and many new "switchers" came along. OS X was sleek, inviting, and as a Mac, reliable. Fast forward to August 24, 2002 - Apple releases OS X 10.2.1. In spite of what appears to be an incremental change in the version number, you are asked to pay another \$200 because it is a "much improved operating system." Well, if it's that improved, why didn't they bump it up to at least version 10.5, or 11? And why is it still called OS X? Oh, that's why its code name, Jaguar, stuck around. They want you to think of it as a new OS. But is it? When you look at your computer after the install of 10.2.1, you'll wonder if you've been had - I know I did.

I may be opening myself up for a

stoning from long time Mac users, but this whole situation reminds me very much of the Microsoft world. Jaguar does not impress me. As an average user, I do not see much of a performance difference between 10.1 and 10.2. In fact, on the first Jaguar install, I did an upgrade. My PowerBook was very sluggish. Boot-up time was around three minutes, and I could almost crash it on command. I re-installed as a clean install. Things were back to normal - and only normal.

At the same time Jaguar was announced, Apple also announced the end of free .Mac e-mail addresses and has since moved to a pay site for US\$100 a year. Again Mac loyalists were sent into a tizzy. As of January 1, 2003, Apple will officially stop development on OS 9. Soon, Classic OS users will be left out in the cold. How very un-Apple like.

I still like being in my new Mac world. Working on a PC and using a Mac at home reminds me how often I hate the PC and how I turn to the Mac for comfort. Apple is going through a new growing phase right now. The spotlight is back on the company, and it really is building some good machines and software. It just needs to be reminded of the Apple philosophy and what it means to those coming from the Dark Side.

The bottom line - if you haven't switched to OS X yet, do it now. You won't regret it. I can only imagine that when bread was first sliced, people reacted the same way as you will when you see the Aqua screen come to life. If you have OS X 10.1 and have no problems, save your money. There really isn't anything that justifies \$200 unless you are into running serious applications like video editing.

As for Apple, remember where you came from. The current products emphasize what Apple has stood for these past 20 years. Quality products, combined with Apple's philosophy, are strong reasons for PC users to switch and for Mac loyalists to be proud. It would be a shame to find another "switch" going on behind the scenes. ♦

more info

If you feel the need to voice your opinions about the Jaguar debate check out these two articles:

www.petitiononline.com/nopay129/
www.petitiononline.com/AppleOSX/

OS X 10.2.2 is already available, as an update to 10.2 through Apple's update software

Requirements for Jaguar:
Power Mac G3/G4, iMac, eMac, PowerBook G4
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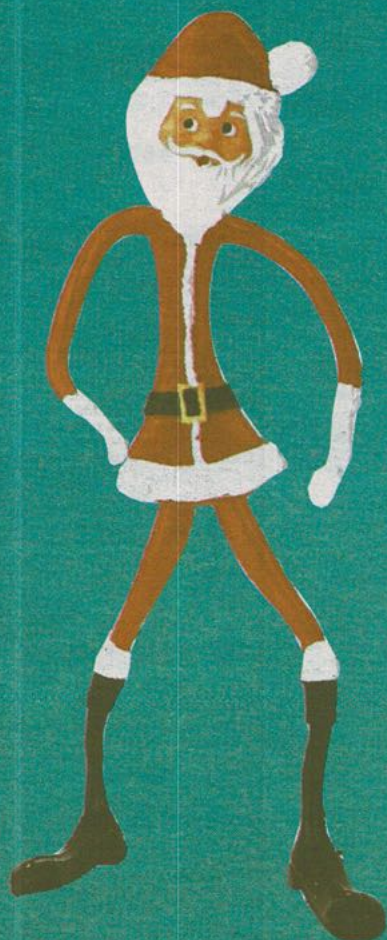
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Celebrating Christmas around the world



A variety of Scrooges keep trying to wipe that ubiquitous holiday, Christmas, off the calendar, but there's no way it will disappear completely, given the way it's ingrained in our culture and our minds. In a spiritual way, in a commercial way, and in that hard to explain red-and-green sweaters, gingerbread cookie and little, cute elves kind of way.

In any case, it doesn't hurt to remind kids that even something like Christmas is celebrated so very differently in various corners of the globe. Christmas in Australia is not like Christmas in Norway – and it's not just because of the weather. Check out the following sites to give your kids some global perspective (and by that I mean more than just tracking Santa's sleigh as it whizzes across the globe).

www.travlang.com/languages/christmas.html

Oh, the many, many ways to say Merry Christmas and Happy New Year! Impress your friends with a Welsh "Nadolig Llawen a Blwyddyn Newydd Da!" That's after you've mastered "Meri Kurisumasu soshite Akemashite Omedeto" (that's Japanese). The list includes languages from A (Afrikaans), to almost Z (Yoruba).

www.the-north-pole.com/around

This is the place to go for short explanations on how Christmas is celebrated around the world – from Australia to Venezuela. Learn that, for example, "the Christmas tree has never been particularly popular in France," and that "Iran, formerly Persia, is the land where the Three Wise Men are believed to have lived when Jesus was born." For Russia there are explanations on how the holidays have been affected by political change, or you can find out about Japanese fascination with Christmas culture.

The only thing missing on the site is a quiz – to force you to recall all that you've learned. And it would be nice if there were links to each country, since the write-ups make you want to know even more.

www.algonet.se/~bernadot/christmas/calendar.html

This page, which calls itself the World Wide Christmas Calendar, is produced by the International School in

Copenhagen, Denmark. What better place than a school full of children from around the world to create a global calendar?

Click on any of the gifts beneath the tree (you could actually do this day-by-day with your kids, for a sort of interactive online advent calendar) and read children's stories about how they celebrate Christmas back home.

Here are some examples:

#12: Latvia: "We celebrate Christmas on December 24."

#13: Sweden: "The kids sing and wear long white dresses."

#2: Portugal: "We can't forget Christmas candies which are delicious: Sweet vermicelli; a kind of bread fritter and King-cake all with Oporto wine."

www.santatelevision.com

Visit this page and you'll never forget it. Santatelevision is all video – and will give you a glimpse into the mythical Finnish world of elves just south of the Arctic Circle – otherwise known as Lapland.

See what a Finnish snow castle looks like, watch how gigantic gingerbread cookies are made and stay tuned for the Elf Adventures (including a new one – where the elf meets up with the Forest Maid). You can also see what a real live European Christmas market looks like and get recipes for true European Christmas goodies, including Gingerbread Cookies and Wild Boar.

This site combines aspects of real Christmas with the fantastical part, making you wish you were there ... with the elves.

www.santa.gl/asp/index.asp?language=uk

Who knew Santa Claus is the ambassador to Greenland? Better yet – who knew Greenland is the true home of Mr. Claus?

This site is the only one reviewed that employs heavy use of Flash animation, and is a treat because it's not made in North America. (You'll have to do with a version from a few Christmases past, but that shouldn't affect the show, except that it's a bit slower than what we're used to these days.)

Play the Christmas trees game, read Christmas fairytales (like Lunte and the Story of the Fake Santa), travel around Santa's Kongsgarten to see what the elves are up to, and most important, find out what Christmas in Greenland is really about. ♦

Kid-proofing for fun and safety

By MARA GULENS

We've all heard those wacky stories about computer illiterate adults using CD holders for cups and mice as pedals. You'll probably not be surprised to know these kinds of stories are rarely heard about kids. It's not that kids are born knowing how to use a computer, but kids do have different reference points. They see an adult grasping the mouse with their hand – why would they consider it a pedal? Ditto the CD holder. On the other hand, computers appeal to kids in an

entirely different way.

"Kids like buttons and they're curious," points out Darryl Reiter, president of the Children's Technology Workshop. This means your computer may get poked and prodded in ways the salesman at Future Shop never envisioned.

Sue Borden, marketing manager for Microsoft Canada's Home and Entertainment Division, has had plenty of opportunity to observe how her three kids (two aged eight, one aged five), interact with computers.

"The PC is generally pretty

resilient against the wear and tear of kids, barring it being dropped on the floor," she says. Nonetheless, mishaps do happen – but many are preventable.

Here are some suggestions on how to make your computer kid-proof and, ultimately, kid-friendly. Also, some tips on what to do if something goes wrong.

No food or drinks at the computer

Borden says the



Kid-proofing for fun and safety

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two pieces of the PC most likely to be targeted by spills are the keyboard and mouse.

Fortunately, new computer mice come with optical technology, meaning no trackballs or openings – and no access for food or drink.

But the best way to avoid messing up the keyboard and mouse is to keep food and drinks away completely. "What I encourage in my home ... is to not have food or drink around our family computer," says Borden. "My husband and I

follow the same rule."

If a spill does occur, disconnect the keyboard immediately and flip it over. Blot the top with a paper towel, blow compressed air between the keys and leave it to air dry overnight.

Borden advises parents to teach children what to do if a spill does occur and to have a can of compressed air on hand for emergencies.

For smudges and fingerprints on the monitor, use Windex sprayed on a cloth.

Keep peripherals within reach

If peripherals, like printers, scanners

and paper, are hard to get to, kids could end up slipping and falling – injuring themselves and damaging the computer. Borden says ensuring all peripherals are within easy reach, so children don't have to climb on chairs and tables to gain access, is the ideal solution.

Proper PC usage is key

It's important to teach kids the proper way to use the PC, says Borden. Kids need to know how to insert and remove CDs, how to properly close applications and how to correctly start up and turn off a computer.

Parental supervision

We hear it again and again, and still doubt it: Family computers need to be placed in family rooms, where kids can be supervised.

"In my household the computer room/library is on the main level," explains Borden. "I can clearly see it from the kitchen. I can hear what's going on – this at least gives me a pretty good sense of what [the kids] are doing/seeing." Supervision reduces the risk of kids doing something they shouldn't be doing. After all, mom or dad is watching. ♦

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A quest that can make you queasy

By MARA GULENS

This review was almost aborted for health reasons. The first time, I thought the nausea was just me. It was late, I had been playing *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* for several hours, and the queasy feeling just seemed like some freaky after-dinner nonsense. The second time around, I was convinced it could be nothing other than *Harry Potter* itself making me sick.

When I think about it, the fact that rapid, extended *Harry Potter* and the *Chamber of Secrets* gameplay induced motion sickness is really not that surprising.

The thing is that *Chamber of Secrets*, being the second game in the *Potter* series, is graphically stunning, and very realistic (as far as the unrealistic setting of magical Hogwarts can be). That said, when you're spinning around madly trying to make sure you don't get attacked by Fire Crabs or Cornish Pixies, it's no wonder the body feels it's actually there, on the ascending spiral ramp, going up, up, up in order to obtain another Challenge Star.

The best advice I found on the Internet about gaming and motion sickness was the following: "If you or your child experience any of these symptoms, discontin-

ue use and play again later."

But most likely (and this is why the gaming industry is worth \$9 billion a year) you'll be so caught up in the game you'll repeat "I'll stop at the next save game point" even as you save ...

The review

To review this title, I have to step back in time to before I felt sick. Anticipation for this title was huge. Being back in Harry's world is nothing short of exhilarating. All the comments, including "Since you've been off all summer, let's start easy," and "First, a quick recap of what we did last year," seem directed at you, the player, because yes, it has been a while since you were at Hogwarts, jumping from ledge to ledge, casting spells.

Fortunately, EA Games has taken a look at some of what was just plain too hard in *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*, and improved on it for game two. Passing a spell test no longer requires impossibly perfected mouse skills, but rather the use of the arrow keys. Flying on a broomstick is much simpler and doesn't require a full day of practice.

The fact you can still only save at points chosen by the game developers is, I guess, a plus, in terms of keeping players tied to the game. However, as mentioned, this could go on for so long that you'll really

have to be sympathetic when junior says he'll come to dinner "at the next save."

Also, the long waits for scenes to load, and extensive "cut scenes" (narratives that move the story along) get frustrating. After all, this is a game, and we just want to play.

Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets also requires perseverance. My first time around, I got greedy and tried to collect as many Bertie Bott's Every Flavour Beans as I could, and ended up getting lost and going around in circles. Second time around, I focused on getting to class as quickly as possible. Having learned from my mistakes, I whipped up spiral staircases, zapped Giant Orange Slime Snails like there was no tomorrow, and well, that's precisely when I started to feel sick. ♦

more INFO

Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets
\$39.99
EA Games
www.harrypotter.ea.com

Requirements:
Minimum: Pentium 350 MHz, Windows 95 and higher, 4X CD-ROM/DVD-ROM drive, 64 MB RAM, 600 MB hard drive space, DirectX 8.0a compatible sound card, 4 MB video card, mouse

Recommended: 500 MHz or faster Pentium processor, 128 MB or more RAM, 8X or faster CD-ROM/DVD-ROM drive, DirectX 8.0a supported controller/joystick



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Got a question? Ask an expert

By HAROLD LASS

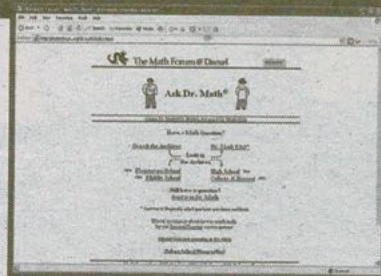
To the unwary and naive, the Internet can be a minefield of lunatic sites offering "expert" advice on just about anything. But if you know where to look, the genuine experts are there and many of them will post answers to your questions on their Web sites or even answer directly by e-mail. Do you have questions about space, astronomy, history, computers, sports, arts, grammar or business?

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The affordable and colourful Lexmark X85

By NESTOR GULA

Multifunction devices are meant to save space and money in your home and/or office. Combining a printer, scanner and copier actually makes a lot of sense. At a price of just under \$250, the Lexmark X85 will save you a lot of money.

Of course, the entry-level price means there are not many frills with this all-in-one device — no media reading cards, no paper feeding mechanism. What you do get is a photo-quality colour printer that prints up to 4,800x1,200 dots per inch (dpi) in black and in colour on photo-quality paper. High resolution mode on regular paper prints at 1,200x1,200 dpi. There is a draft mode for printing copies, scans or images from your computer, which prints at 600x300 dpi and is very quick.

The printer will spit out up to 12 pages per minute (ppm) in black and 6 ppm in colour. The printer part of the X85 is based on Lexmark's current technology, so the quality is good. The two ink cartridges — one black, one colour — contain the print heads, so the quality is

always maintained. The printer can handle a wide variety of paper as well as labels, envelopes and iron-on transfers.

The scanner/copier part of this multifunction device scans at a reasonable 600x1,200 dpi with 48-bit colour depth and 8-bit black depth, showing 256 levels of grey. Scans from photographs and magazines came out very well. The scanning function works very well, sending the image to a simple proprietary photo editor in the PC. There are two buttons to choose between colour and black-and-white copying, and you can adjust copy quality between high, normal and quick. You can zoom from 25 to 400 per cent of the original image and make up to 99 copies at a time.

However, you have to realize that printing on an inkjet is costly — the colour cartridge is about \$60, while the black one is about \$50. The standard



colour cartridge is rated to give 275 pages of colour printing at 15 per cent coverage, while the black cartridge is rated for 600 pages at five per cent coverage. Printing full-colour images on regular paper, I got 55 pages printed before the quality started to lapse.

Most multifunction devices have fax capabilities, but the X85 does not — the machine does not have a telephone keypad on the control panel and does not have a modem built-in. Instead, it uses the PC's fax/modem (if installed) for its fax functionality. (The fax software only works with a PC, not with a Mac.)

In all, the Lexmark X85 is a solid multifunction device. The print quality is good and the two-line monochrome LCD display makes it very easy to use. ♦

more INFO

X85
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www.lexmark.com

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Do it all with the HP PSC 2210

By NESTOR GULA

With the growing clutter on our desks, multifunction devices make more and more sense. The HP PSC 2210 is a very handsome unit, bedecked in the blue and silver of Hewlett-Packard's corporate signature. Besides printing, faxing, copying and scanning, the PSC 2210 has four digital media slots: CompactFlash, Secure Digital, Memory Stick, and SmartMedia.

The best thing about this all-in-one machine is its functionality. You need a copy — hit the copy button, select black-and-white or colour and out it pops. Same with scanning photos into the computer — pressing one button opens a window on your computer's screen and it's a simple procedure from then on. Kudos go to Hewlett-Packard for making this unit very easy to use.

As a printer, the PSC 2210 is fair, with a 1,200x1,200 dots per inch (dpi) print resolution in both colour and black-and-white. If you are going to print photos, you can buy and install the

optional six ink cartridge (C6658A) for enhanced colour reproduction. You can also optimize the printing up to 4,800x1,200.

Works with PCs and Macs

The flatbed scanner is great if you are scanning from a book or old and delicate photographs, but it is a drawback when you want to fax a document with more than one page — the procedure becomes rather cumbersome. As mentioned, scanning photos is easy — when copying pictures you have to option to fit a small photo to a page or make several copies on one page.

Using any one of the four compatible memory cards is a snap on the PSC 2210. After inserting a card, the unit reads it and asks if you want to print the photos or save them to your PC. Before printing any of the individual photos,

you can print a photo proof sheet and see thumbnails of the photos you took. This proof sheet can be used to select the photos you want to print — the photos are selected, the proof sheet is scanned, and the selected photos are printed individually from the memory card. This is very intuitive technology.

On the whole, the Hewlett-Packard PSC 2210 is a very good machine. It worked flawlessly without a hiccup. If

you are looking for a multifunction unit, you can't really go wrong with this one. ♦



more INFO

PSC 2210
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www.hp.ca

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Fly the Megatech Sky Vector RC plane

By ANDREW MOORE-CRISPIN

Many kids and grownups alike have a fascination with all things radio-controlled, though the kids are more likely to admit it.

With this in mind, I jumped at the chance to have a look at the Megatech Sky Vector radio-controlled plane.

Obviously, with a price tag of \$180 compared to upwards of \$200 for a beginner RC plane without the needed radio or servos, some sacrifices must be made. The biggest sacrifice is in the plane's functionality. Where most RC planes have separate controls for rudder, aileron and throttle, the Sky Vector only has throttle and rudder control with the included radio. The wing is static, which leaves the throttle and small rear ailerons to control climbing. Since the rear ailerons are also act as a rudder, things can get a little difficult.

Cutting down on the controls makes the plane easier to get up in the air than other RC planes, but also limits its maneuverability.

However, the biggest benefit the Sky Vector offers is that it's pretty well ready to fly out of the box, once the included battery has been charged for four hours and eight AA batteries have been put in the transmitter, that is. Users only need to attach the wing with three rubber bands before taking to the air.

The benefit of attaching the wing with rubber bands is that if the plane crash lands (and it probably will before you get the hang of it), the wing is less likely to break.

The packaging states the Sky Vector is

If all goes well (and it probably won't in your first few attempts) the Sky Vector can get up as high as 300 feet. Once there, it is possible to do barrel rolls and loops with careful control of the rudder and throttle.



for people age 10 and up, though more realistically, the user should probably be at least 12 before getting this toy.

Parents should also consider the extra attention that has to be given to RC planes when compared with RC cars. With an RC car, the child can go outside and play immediately (or as soon as the battery is charged, as the case may be). RC planes require a lot of open space away from trees, people, power lines and of course, buildings.

The Sky Vector is a hand launched plane, and requires a little bit of wind to get airborne. The plane has to be going

full-throttle, then the pilot has to toss it straight forward into the wind. If all goes well (and it probably won't in your first few attempts) the Sky Vector can get up as high as 300 feet. Once there, it is possible to do barrel rolls and loops with careful control of the rudder and throttle.

The nose assembly is made of a low density plastic, presumably to keep the weight down. However, there is a seam running down the middle of the nose and going the length of the body. This makes for an obvious weak spot; our

test plane's nose split on its first crash landing.

One would be well-advised not to fly this plane over concrete or any other hard surface, as the wing is made of high-density Styrofoam. Unfortunately, I learned this the hard way and landing on the concrete gouged the wing, making it less aerodynamic.

The propeller is another weak spot, though this is usually the case with RC planes.

Fortunately the plane comes with two extras for just such an emergency ... I'm on the third.

All this said, in a soft grass field, this plane can take its knocks

and still fly out the other

side. Also,

replacement parts can be purchased from

the Megatech Web site; propellers go for US\$4 for two, and a spare wing runs US\$16.

If your child wants to get into the world of RC airplanes, the Sky Vector would be a good place to start, but if RC modeling is just a passing fancy, try to steer him or her toward RC cars or boats; they're safer and easier. ♦

more INFO

Megatech Sky Vector
\$180
Megatech
www.megatech.com

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Shoot up your screen with this Light Gun

By CHRIS TALBOT

At first glance, the Act Labs USB Light Gun doesn't look like much, but it's actually a spectacular light gun for PC shooting games. However, the lack of many PC shooting games makes the light gun a poor investment for most fans of the genre.

... the Act Labs USB Light Gun is a dream for shooting game fans like myself.

Shaped like a small pistol, the USB Light Gun could be used by both kids and adults. Installation is a breeze under Windows XP, but installing it with Windows 9x is a tad more difficult.

Operation was what concerned me the most, but any fears were put to rest when I calibrated the light gun (done by flipping a switch on the side of the gun and moving it vertically and horizontally about an inch from the monitor) and popped in Sega's *House of the Dead 2*. The light gun played flawlessly in *HotD2* and didn't require any extra calibration. Impressive.

A rubber grip makes the light gun comfortable to hold, and its low weight will ensure that your arm won't fall off after a few levels. There's no force feedback, so the realism of kickback is lacking, but this is a minor fault. Compared to using current generation light guns for console video games, which require extensive calibra-



tion and are still not very accurate, the Act Labs USB Light Gun is a dream for shooting game fans like myself.

It connects to your computer via USB and a small box that attaches to the monitor port. The monitor is then plugged into the box. Install the drivers

and installation is complete.

Unfortunately, there is a serious lack of PC shooting games. Besides *HotD2*, the Act Labs Web site lists only a few commercial games that are compatible with the gun - *Art Is Dead*, *Cyberia*, *Ed Hunter*, *Mad Dog McCree*, *Rebel Assault 2* and *Who Shot Johnny Rock?* Also listed are a bunch of emulator games and online Shockwave/Flash-enabled games. There is also a list of games that are not supported.

The Act Labs USB Light Gun is an excellent light gun, but the few shooting games available for PC will probably turn all but the most die-hard shooting game fans away. ♦

more info

Act Labs USB Light Gun
www.act-labs.com
US\$29.99

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GMX LCD Monitor for the road

By CHRIS TALBOT

With its six-inch screen, the GMX TFT LCD Monitor isn't going to be a solid replacement for that plasma screen TV you've had your eye on, but for a portable TV, it has a very sharp screen and is great for watching TV shows (through an aerial or coaxial cable), movies or even for playing video games.

Through the coax or RCA inputs, it's possible to connect just about any audio/video device to the monitor. Audio is only available in mono sound, though (no stereo sound). Powered by

an external adapter, the GMX monitor can be mounted in a car, making it a good backseat babysitter. However, losing the remote control between the seats might become a problem, as the included remote is no bigger than a credit card and is very thin. It is a nice remote control, though.

We tested this with the NextBase DVD Player and it worked like a charm. I'm not sure I'd want to spend too much time staring at the GMX monitor's tiny screen, but in a pinch, it's a good substitute when a

Travelers might find it interesting that the GMX monitor supports both PAL and NTSC video formats, so if you're heading outside of North America, you'll be able to take the unit with you and use it in your travels.



regular TV isn't available (I just can't bring myself to watch movies in the car). Travelers might find it interesting that the GMX monitor supports both

PAL and NTSC video formats, so if you're heading outside of North America, you'll be able to take the unit with you and use it in your travels.

The price will scare more than a few people off, though. The \$188.58 price tag makes the GMX TFT LCD Monitor more costly than TVs that are more than twice its size (granted, they're not LCD). With that in mind, this monitor might not be such a great deal, but adding the cost of it to the NextBase DVD Player, the price of portable DVD watching isn't all that bad, especially when you compare the price to that of all-in-one units (typically around \$1,000). ♦

more INFO

GMX TFT LCD Monitor
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Tested: NextBase Portable DVD Player

By CHRIS TALBOT

As a multifunction DVD player, the NextBase Portable DVD Player does what you need it to do, but exactly how sturdy its structure is remains to be seen.

The NextBase is capable of playing DVDs, VCDs and audio CDs, as well as MP3s (although we only tested the video capabilities of this player). The quality is as good as any basic DVD player on the market, but the size is little bigger than an early portable CD player (enormous compared to today's portable CD players, but still compact enough to lug around). However, I wouldn't want to run the NextBase through a drop test. The plastic casing seems sturdy enough for transporting, but the cover seems too flimsy to withstand a drop (to be fair, few DVD players, even portable ones, could withstand being dropped).

Power is gained from an AC adapter, and the player can be connected to a TV through standard input/output cables or an S-video connection. The NextBase doesn't sound like anything special at

first, does it? However, it has absolutely the best DVD player remote control I've ever seen. A nice fit with all of the necessary buttons, the controller also has easily-identifiable subtitle, language track and angle buttons. Since I'm a big fan of Japanimation films, being able to quickly switch between the English and Japanese language tracks and subtitles is very nice.

According to Merconnet, the company that imports the NextBase player (among other gadgets like the Nideo digital camera featured in the July issue), the player is region-free and therefore able to play DVDs from anywhere in the world. Multi-region DVDs and DVD players have gained a lot of attention from the powers that be in Hollywood. With the world being divided into six DVD regions, you typically couldn't play a European region DVD in a North American DVD player. With players like the NextBase, you could import movies from all over the world and watch them. As you can imagine, this is something that Hollywood is trying to stop people from doing.



The NextBase is available through Merconnet's Web site for \$243.25, plus \$14 shipping (via Canada Post). Perhaps a tad pricey when you consider that DVD players can be had for as little \$150 these days — what might attract people to this unit is the region-free playability and the compactness of the unit (it weighs in at 0.6 kg and measures

20.5x3.2x15.5 cm). However, for portable viewing, users will also need to buy a portable TV. ♦

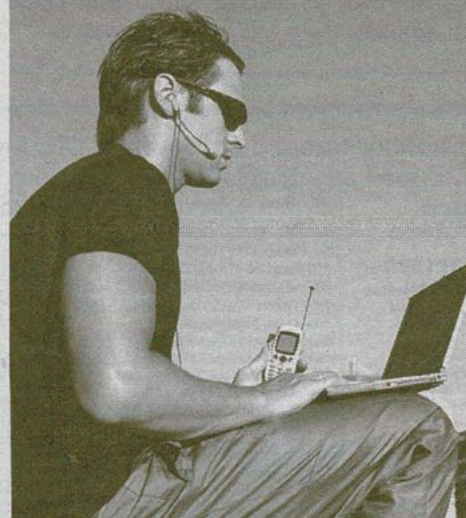
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Epson Stylus Photo 925 prints images right out of the box

By ANDREW MOORE-CRISPIN

The latest addition to Epson's robust line of consumer level photo printers is loaded with features to give digital darkroom technicians more options when making prints.

However, its name, Epson Stylus Photo 925, gives away its biggest flaw. The 925 is a photo printer, and as such,

(contact sheet) with numbered thumbnails of all the images held on the card. Users can then choose which images to print, paper size and type using the relatively large monochrome LCD display. The 925 works well for printing sans computer, but the addition of the optional full colour 1.6 inch LCD preview screen which attaches to the back of the printer and, while the printer

Overall, photo print quality was good with rich tones and true highlights. However, images, especially brightly lit images, are printed with slight red cast, which can take away the impact of the picture. The other problem encountered while printing photos on the 925 in images with dark spots, these dark areas of the print lack detail that was visible in the original image. This is especially



consumers should use their own brand of paper).

A nice feature of the 925 is that it comes with two black and two photo colour cartridges as well as an approximately 10-foot long roll of 4-inch photo paper, 20 bordered and 50 borderless 4x6 and 25 8.5x11 inch glossy photo paper.

I'm sure there are ulterior motives there; the first one is always free, as they

A nice feature of the 925 is that it comes with two black and two photo colour cartridges as well as an approximately 10-foot long roll of 4-inch photo paper, 20 bordered and 50 borderless 4x6 and 25 8.5x11 inch glossy photo paper.

doesn't do a very good job with text. Our test document came out readable but fuzzy and oversaturated. Also, printing text is slower than what users might be used to from an all purpose ink jet printer.

However, for users printing a large number of photos, the 925 would be right at home.

The printer has memory card slots to accept different kinds of storage media (CompactFlash type I and II, Microdrive, Memory Stick and SmartMedia). This gives the 925 direct photo printing capability as well as making it an all-in-one solution for getting images stored on memory cards into the PC. When printing direct from memory card, users can tell the 925 to print an index print

allows for some basic image correction without it, would make this process a little less trial and error. Without said colour screen, making prints direct from storage media requires a bit of guesswork based on the index print. Users have to choose brightness, contrast and saturation levels from a minus to plus two scale. For example, the brightness, if being set from the monochrome LCD screen, goes from brightest, brighter, standard, darker and finally to darkest. Not terribly descriptive terms when working with photographs.

After making a few prints directly from a memory card, users will have an idea of how individual images will turn out. However, as will all direct print photo printers, there will be some mistakes.

apparent in nighttime shots, where the printer can't display the subtle differences in a dark scene, and instead looks to cover the area with solid black.

Possibly the most valuable element of the 925 is the roll paper feeder. After feeding the paper and losing about 1cm, prints will be continuous without losing any more paper. The printer can accept 4-inch and 8.3-inch wide photo roll paper, and prints edge to edge without white space. The printer is also equipped with an automatic cutter head for trimming prints off from the roll paper.

It's no secret that printer manufacturers usually sell hardware at a loss, and recoup their money with ink cartridge sales as well as photo paper (manufacturers naturally say that for best results,

say. However, if you're buying a photo printer to really get in to digital darkroom work anyway, it's nice to get the supplies to do so right out of the box. Everything but the USB cable is included.

Epson claims the 925 will print 220 pages with 15 per cent colour coverage. ♦

more INFO

Epson Stylus Photo 925
\$379.00

Requirements:

PC — Windows 98/ME/2000/XP - 233 MHz or higher

Mac — Mac OS 8.5.1 - 9X or 10.1 - G3 or G4 - 64 MB RAM (128 recommended), 200 MB HD space

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A tale of two *Photoshops*

By NESTOR GULA

The problem with software upgrades is that you sometimes need a hardware upgrade to run them. I was afraid of this since the computer I was going to use to test the latest Photoshop versions is a five-year veteran. It is a beige G3 Macintosh with a scintillating 233 MHz processor and 160 MB of RAM. It meets the minimum requirements to run Adobe's *Photoshop 7 (P7)* and *Photoshop Elements 2 (PE2)*, but only barely — *P7* recommends more RAM than I have installed. As a backup to the tests I also ran both software packages on a Dell Dimension 8200 — this computer is relatively new with a 1.7 GHz processor and 512 MB of memory.

My biggest concern was whether *P7* would run. It ran on both my computers very well. *PE2* was the one that I had concerns with. On the Mac the welcome screen and the file browser performed rather sluggishly. However this sluggishness did not extend to photo manipulation. *PE2* and *P7* performed similar tasks, cropping, rotating, applying the same filters to identical pictures — at nearly identical speeds on the G3 Macintosh. In fact *P7* and *PE2* outperformed similar tasks done in *Photoshop 6*. All timing was done by stopwatch. Similar tests done on the Dell PC

revealed that things were done in nearly equal times, although because of the benefit of over 700 per cent more processing speed and over 300 percent more memory (not to mention cache improvements and other advances in technology) things went much quicker than on the Mac.

Just because of the cost, most people will be inclined to look at *PE2*. For the price of about \$150 you get a very robust program. The original *Photoshop Elements* was a very good program and Adobe has managed to really spice up the new release. *PE2* is not a cut rate version of *Photoshop* — it is a very powerful photo editing suite that is aimed at the average consumer and photo hobbyist. It even has some features that are not available in *P7*.

Chief among these and one that will get a lot of use is the Quick Fix function that brings all the standard image-correction elements (like Auto Level, Fill-Flash, Auto Focus or Rotate) into one handy dialogue box. There is a before and after thumbnail image so that you can quickly determine whether the enhancements you are dialing in are improving the photo or not. My only question is: Why did Adobe not create a keyboard shortcut for this function?

Because *PE2* is geared to non-professionals, there are extensive help and tutorial features built into this package.

Very helpful is the Embedded Help Field right in the top menu bar that gives you quick access to whatever step you might be stuck on.

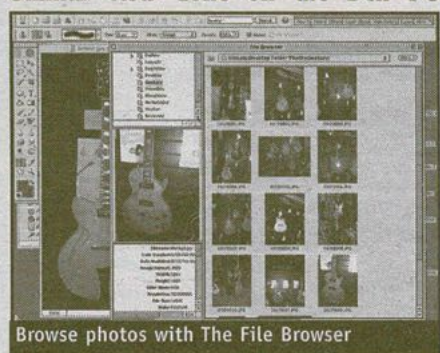
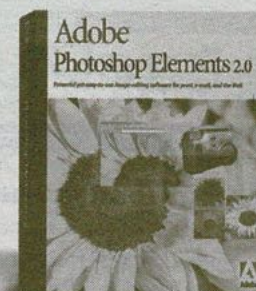
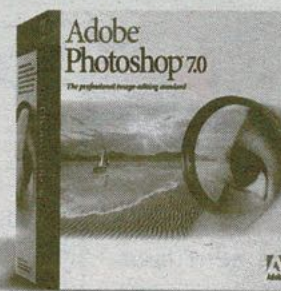
Adobe has upgraded the Recipes, which are tutorials for people who want to explore and master photo-editing techniques. Other useful additions are the ability to capture a still image from a video file, either MPEG, AVI, WMV or QuickTime, or the ability to create a slideshow in a PDF.

A great feature that is common to both *PE2* and *P7* is the File Browser. This makes going through your photographs so much easier. You have a thumbnail of all the photos and images on one dialogue window. Here you get all the EXIF data that digital cameras record with the image. You can rotate, rename, reformat and resize the images in this window. Better yet you can do this in batches that will eliminate a lot of drudgery work and save great gobs of time.

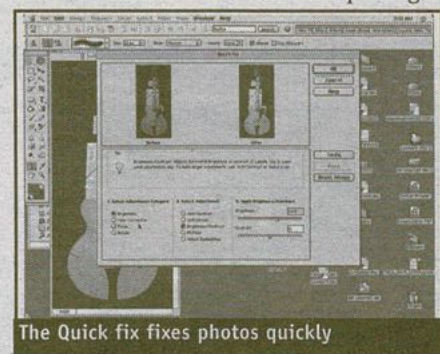
With *P7* you get a full-fledged professional photo-editing package. This is the standard by which everything else is measured. There are several key features

that enhance an already great product. *P7* (as well as *PE2*) is compatible with Mac OSX and Windows XP. In terms of usability, *P7* gets a couple of features that make it more usable. You can create customized workspaces that let you personalize your desktop with the palettes you use most. This can be saved and easily accessed for later use. You can also customize any of the many tools available in *P7* and save the new settings as a new tool. A spell checker has been added, as has a new healing brush that is an enhanced version of the ever popular cloning tool.

For nearly \$1,100 *P7* is aimed directly at the professional user. The average home user has no need of the power and complexity of such a program. With its new features *PE2* represents a great value for digital camera users and anyone else who is in need of a powerful yet reasonably priced photo-editing package. ♦



Browse photos with The File Browser



The Quick fix fixes photos quickly

more INFO

Photoshop Elements 2.0

\$149.99

Adobe

www.adobe.com

Requirements:

Mac — Power PC G3, G4 or G4 dual processor
Mac OS 9.1 or higher, 128MB of RAM, 350MB of available hard disk space, Colour monitor capable of displaying thousands of colours at a resolution of 800x600 or greater, CD-ROM drive

PC — Pentium class processor, Windows 98/ME/2000/XP, 128MB of RAM
150MB of available hard disk space, Colour monitor capable of displaying thousands of colours at a resolution of 800x600 or greater, Internet Explorer 5.0 or higher, CD-ROM drive

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Photoshop 7.0

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Requirements:

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Mac OS 9.1 or higher, 128MB of RAM (192MB recommended), 320MB of available hard disk space, Colour monitor with 16-bit colour or greater video card, 800x600 or greater monitor resolution, CD-ROM drive

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Video game maker apologizes to Sikhs

The video games industry has never been known as a bastion of good taste, but once in a while, a company steps far enough over the line that it has to do some very rare backpedaling.

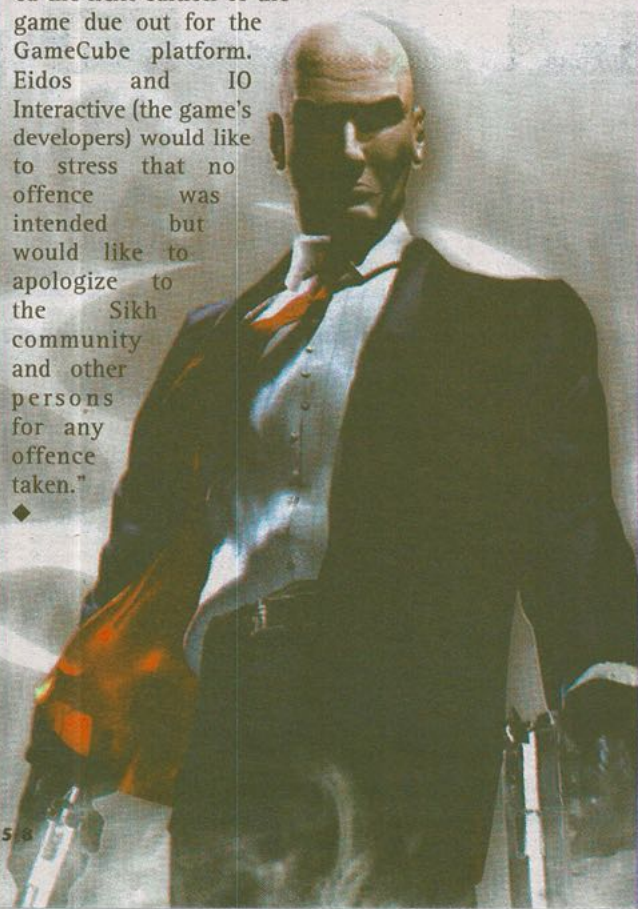
Such was the case with *Hitman 2: Silent Assassin*, a game from UK-based Eidos, which is best known for making the *Tomb Raider* series of games featuring pixel pinup Lara Croft.

The game follows the exploits of a bald-headed hitman as he travels the world to carry out contract killings. The plotline eventually takes him to an unnamed temple, where he is instructed to kill a group of terrorists hiding inside. Eidos received a barrage of complaints that the game was offensive because the turban-wearing terrorists are seemingly portrayed as Sikhs, and that the inside of the temple looks strikingly similar to the Golden Temple in Amritsar, India, where hundred of Sikhs were killed in a bloody ambush by Indian government troops in 1984. The Indian government said at the time that the temple was being used to plan military activities.

Existing copies of the game have since been recalled by Eidos, with the offending sequences taken out, and images of the sequence have been removed from the game's Web site.

Eidos released a statement to explain the recall, saying, "We have taken steps to amend the game on all existing platforms and adapted the next edition of the game due out for the GameCube platform. Eidos and IO Interactive (the game's developers) would like to stress that no offence was intended but would like to apologize to the Sikh community and other persons for any offence taken."

◆



By GEOFF MARTIN

Hollywood has always been a closed-door affair to all but the savviest of insiders, but at least one industry heavyweight is trying to open a door or two to those who would otherwise never get a chance.

Kevin Spacey, the Oscar-winning star of such films as *American Beauty* and *The Shipping News*, has teamed up with director (and former Spacey assistant) Dana Brunetti to launch Triggerstreet.com, a site dedicated to giving screenwriters and short film makers a chance to have their work reviewed by peers, and potentially get some notice from Hollywood executives.

Site members can upload a script they've written or a short film they've produced, in order to have it reviewed by other TriggerStreet members. But before their work is available for review, they must first review at least two other films or screenplays.

Spacey made an appearance at the recent Comdex trade show in Las Vegas to promote the new venture, and said that even though he taking a one-year break from acting in order to get the project up and running, the site does not have a business plan, charges no entrance or membership fees and is not aiming to make any money.

"You don't have to pay, you just have to participate in the process," Spacey said in a Reuters news report.

The technology behind the site's streaming video and other features doesn't come for free, of course, but Spacey has been able to enlist the help of sponsors such as Budweiser, Yahoo! and RealNetworks in order to keep the costs down. And by uploading scripts, members agree to negotiate "in good faith" exclusively with TriggerStreet for the rights to develop the script into a movie, should the script be rated in the Top 10 by TriggerStreet members.

TriggerStreet plans to hold "film festivals" on a regular



basis, where the top 10-rated short films on the site will be reviewed by celebrity guests such as U2's Bono and actors Danny DeVito and Annette Benning.

Throughout the site, there is much talk of TriggerStreet being a community, where members are encouraged to help each other. As with any process that involves peer review, however, not everyone will always treat their fellow community members with an overabundance of respect.

As an example, witness the following review, which was submitted for a screenplay called "The Great Charlie Bean," and which proves there may be no creature as vicious as the failed screenwriter:

"This is gross, disgusting, shabbily written, awful, but it might have the appeal of a car wreck. Now that I think about it, a car wreck would have been preferable to reading this script. There is no talent here."

Nor tact, apparently.



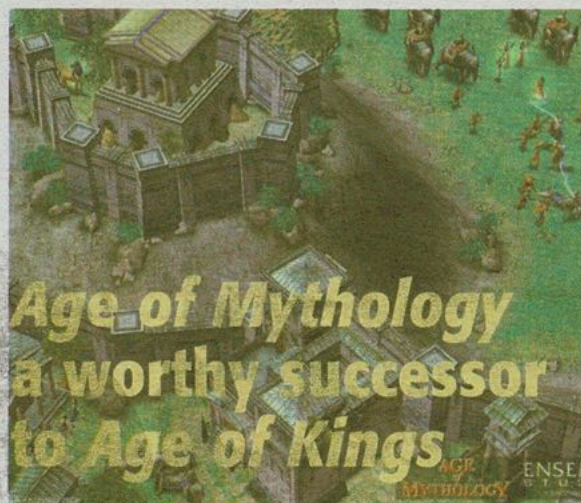
Crackers matter to Farscape fans

The science-fiction television show *Farscape* has enjoyed rave reviews from sci-fi fans and critics, and won several industry awards, but failed to find a large audience, and was recently cancelled by the U.S.-based SciFi Channel before the start of its fifth season. But while its core audience never managed to expand beyond a peak of about 1.5 million viewers, the dedication of those viewers is becoming apparent through a very well-organized "Save *Farscape*" Internet campaign, which culminated in a fan-bought television ad calling for the show's reinstatement being seen in many major American cities.

The ads parodied Apple's recent wave of "Switch" ads, which portray Mac converts telling stories about the events that turned them from angry PC users into Macintosh lovers.

The money for the ads was raised mostly through the project's Web site (www.watchfarscape.com), where other strategies are being hatched and promoted on a regular basis. Another example of the enthusiasm of the show's devotees came when one fan convinced Kentucky Fried Chicken to lobby the television network UPN in favour of picking up the show. *Farscape* fans went out of their way to eat KFC chicken to show their gratitude, and in a little more than a week, they collected nearly US\$3,000 in receipts, which were mailed to the company along with a letter of thanks.

The fans, who call themselves Scapers, have also begun a campaign that involves mailing postcard-sized cutouts from empty cracker boxes with the phrase "Crackers Do Matter," to SciFi channel executives and advertisers, an apparent reference to an episode of *Farscape* titled "Crackers Don't Matter."



pantheon of gods (i.e. Greek, Egyptian, Norse) to follow and build their civilizations by building, expanding and pleasing the gods.

The three mythologies available – Greek, Egyptian and Norse – were chosen because they are the most widely recognized ancient mythologies, said Bruce Shelley, creator of the *AoE* series, at a Microsoft demo event in October (shortly before the game went gold). While gamers familiar with the *AoE* series will see many

similarities, there are a few new additions for this game. For instance, a temple is one of the first things players must build so they can gain Favour, which can then be used to create Hero units (legendary heroes from various ancient myths) and mythological creatures. The heroes and mythological creatures have benefits that ordinary mortal units do not have. For instance, hero units have a much easier time killing mythical creature units.

The benefits for each creature varies. Pegasus is a winged horse from Greek mythology that acts as a flying scout. The Kraken is a giant sea creature that can swim right up to the shores and destroy units en masse. The beasts avail-

able are a good primer for players interested in learning about ancient mythologies. Each god has its own creatures that players can let loose on their enemies.

As players progress through the ages (Archaic, Classical, Heroic and Mythic), they will also choose minor gods to follow, and they will be given up to four use-once god powers. The powers available depend, once again, on which god or pantheon players have decided to follow. In some cases, players will be able to create a magical stone that will attract a certain number of herd animals, which can be easily slaughtered for use as food, or players may be able to cause an earthquake to devastate enemies. Everything from creating walking, attacking trees to causing an outbreak of disease in an enemy's encampment is here. These powers can also turn the tide of a war fairly quickly, forcing old-time *AoE* players to get used to creating new strategies.

There is also multiplayer support over a LAN or over the Internet, for those who want an extra challenge.

As in the previous titles in the series, a random map game is available, or players can choose to go through the campaign. In the campaign, players must guide the hero Akantos through quests against the enemies of Atlantis. The difficulty ranges from easy to incredibly difficult, but the scenarios are well

thought-out and are fun to play.

The graphics have been given an upgrade from *Age of Kings*, and the animation and 3D rendering is spectacular. It's a mix of the animated look from *Age of Empires* and the gritty appearance of *Age of Kings*. We tested the game on a state-of-the-art Pentium 4 system and the game looked phenomenal. Animations were smooth and beautiful (the opening sequence for the game will get players psyched up for the game) and the detail level of the units themselves is fairly high. Of course, players will probably see a difference playing on a computer that barely meets the minimum requirements.

Overall, *Age of Mythology* is a worthy successor to the innovative *Age of Empires* and *Age of Kings* games. It's recommended for any real-time strategy game player. ♦

more INFO

Age of Mythology
\$69.99
Microsoft
www.microsoft.com/games/age-ofmythology



Requirements:
Pentium II 450 MHz, 128 MB of memory, 1.5 GB of hard disk space, CD-ROM, 16 MB 3D video card, Windows 98/2000/ME/XP, mouse or compatible pointing device, and an optional 56K modem connection for online play

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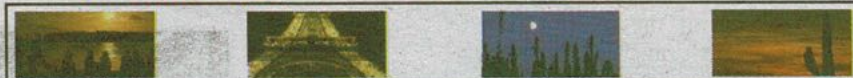
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Submit your photographs, along with the information from the form below, by Jan. 3rd, 2003. You can submit up to three photographs, all of which must be accompanied by a submission form. Entries must be submitted via e-mail. Files should be no bigger than 500 KB. One photo per e-mail.

Contest Rules: Prizes must be claimed by Feb. 28th, 2003. Winners must provide valid identification upon claiming prize. The prizes awarded are not transferable and cannot be redeemed for cash. To enter and to be eligible to win, persons must be residents of Canada, and not employees or be domiciled with an employee of Canada Computes!, its affiliate companies, or advertising or promotional agencies. The winners will be selected by Toronto Computes! on Jan. 8th, 2003 from among all eligible entries received on or before contest close date. Winners will be contacted by telephone or e-mail. In the event that they cannot be contacted within the first week following the contest another entrant will be selected. All entries become the property of Toronto Computes! and may be used in subsequent advertisements for the contest. All entries must be submitted by their artist and must be original work.

Toronto Computes!'s 4th Photo Spree contest form. All submissions must contain this information

Deadline: January 3rd, 2003

Name:

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E-Mail:

Phone Number:

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Occupation/School:

Title of Entry:

Camera Used:

Software Used:

Iron Storm rains metal flakes

By ANDREW MOORE-CRISPIN

Iron Storm's gameplay is wrapped around a unique and interesting core concept: It's 1964, the 50th year of the first World War, which has been a constant since 1914. The war is now traded on the stock markets like a consumer commodity, and as long as the money keeps coming in, it will continue.

This concept opens up some big possibilities for gameplay, with trench and surface warfare à la WW1, but with some new weapons that would no doubt be developed over 50 years of war; though thankfully, we don't know for sure. These include weapons like lasers and futuristic (given the time period) guns as well as some slightly more strange wartime innovations like exploding Doberman Pincers – an interesting idea to be sure.

Iron Storm is traditional first-person shooter (FPS) fare, with the option for a third-person view thrown in for people more familiar with the *Counter-Strike* style of gameplay, but aside from the interesting idea of WW1 continuing for 50 years, it is rather unimaginative and doesn't bring anything new to the genre.

In fact, it plays and looks



more like an FPS title from two years ago than it does a recent one. The graphics are functional, but look like what we might have expected two years ago. For example, when using a sniper rifle, zooming in is choppy (even on our state-of-the-art test machine) and once zoomed in, textures on faces and objects are jagged and aliased. Also, the recoil from firing a shot shows more frame drops and jagged textures. The level graphics are, for the most part, nice and smooth, but character detail and animation ruin the effect. Whether in third- or first-person, animation looks unrealistic. When in third-person, running, turning and jumping look unconvincing; while in first-person, the only character animation gamers will see is their weapon bobbing side to side in a constant loop.

Gameplay is fairly linear, requiring players to complete certain mandatory objectives (without dying, of course) to progress. There are some optional objectives, but little incentive to complete them, unless gamers are looking to up the difficulty level of the game.

Iron Storm bills itself as "between reality and fiction," by creating a fictitious story with real WW1 events at the core. It is definitely an interesting concept, but when compared to other current FPS titles on the PC, it falls short of what we would expect. Poor graphics, dropped frames and general slowdown can render the game unplayable when

there is a lot of on-screen action. In the case of *Iron Storm*, the slowdown is software-related, as our test bed machine beats the recommended requirements on all fronts.

The storyline is interesting and paints a realistic picture of what might have happened if WW1 had continued uninterrupted through 50 years.

However, even with a very intriguing story foundation, the short cutscenes don't follow the story too closely, and give players only enough information to understand the gist of the story and why they are trying to complete a mission. Poor graphics and lacklustre audio and game physics further hamper players from getting involved with the story.

The story manages to push the game along, but even it won't help players to feel involved in the game. It's just not up to the standard that other recent FPS titles have set. ♦

more INFO

Iron Storm
\$49.99
DreamCatcher Interactive
www.iron-storm.com



Requirements:
Windows 98/2000/ME/XP, 500MHz PIII or
AMD Athlon processor, 128MB RAM, 700MB
available HD space, 8x CD-ROM drive, 32MB
Direct3D compatible video card, DirectX 8.1
compatible sound card.

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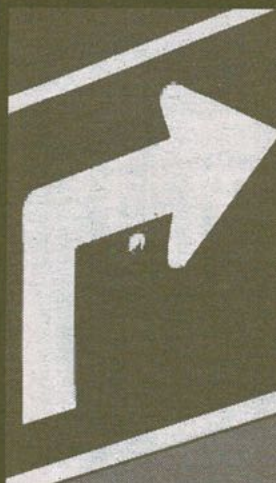


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ONE YEAR EQUALS 15 MONTHS

I have to confess that I have been waiting for this game since it was announced that Jacques Villeneuve and Ubi Soft signed a game development deal about two years ago. For those not in the know, Villeneuve is a Canadian Formula One racer who won the championship in 1997. His father, Gilles, who was a driver as well, died during qualifying for a race in 1982 and has legendary status among Formula One fans. However, when the game arrived at our offices it nearly got ignored — the box art is seriously underwhelming, offering a couple futuristic cars on top of a grainy monochrome image of what I assume to be Jacques Villeneuve's eyes. Not really inspiring stuff.

That being said, the game is quite fantastic. It represents Jacques Villeneuve's vision of racing in 2027. In 25 years, he proposes that the pinnacle of auto racing will be nothing like it is now. Drivers will not be in the cars, but in virtual cockpits, driving their high performance cars by remote — with remote environmental effects, like g-force, bumps, etc. being fed back to the driver. All very nice, but when you play this game, you

Speed Challenge breathes new life into racing simulators



still don't get the environmental effects.

The tracks are also much different. Here you are racing down ultra-smooth, wide streets in the downtown core of cities like Paris, Rio or Montréal. There are 11 tracks in all, and all of them feature quite stunning graphic detail. Players familiar with Montréal will probably recognize some of the buildings and streets — I think a part of the course goes down Côte-des-Neige.

The cars players pilot are radically different than today's cars. First off — if you crash the car, the car will be damaged, affecting your speed for a while. Miraculously, the car will heal itself —

very cool. There are six different cars, each with four different skins. I'm sure there will be countless skins available once a community of players starts to create them.

Although this is a racing simulation game, it is much different than the reality-based games that are on the market now. The interface with the car is different. You get a very informative heads-up-display that

gives you a radar, showing the nearest competitor and a whole host of useful information that you will be too busy to notice at first. After a few sessions you will get used to it and the layout will make perfect sense — you need your revs, look here. Speed is there, lap times in that corner. You can get all sorts of information while using your peripheral vision and not losing concentration. The car can be set up just like real race cars — you can fiddle with the gearing, the brake balance, the roll bars, ride height, wing angles and the like to optimize your car for the track.

There are three main modes of play —

single player, multiplayer (LAN and Internet) and online through Ubi.com. In the Single Player mode you can go to a Quick Race on any one of the circuits; a Grand Prix, which has a Practice and Qualifying session that lead to a race; a Championship, where you earn points racing all 11 Grand Prix in a predetermined order; a Special series, which has a cornucopia of special race series that all feature special themes like race conditions, car behavior and the like and a Time Attack, where you pit yourself against a ghost car to get the best time at a track. There's a lot to do here.

Speed Challenge is a fun game — a great new twist on the car racing simulation genre. Don't let the box fool you. There's a really cool game beneath the cover. This game will also be available for Sony's PlayStation 2 and Nintendo GameCube. ♦

more INFO

Speed Challenge: Jacques Villeneuve's Racing Vision

\$44.99

Ubi Soft

www.jvracingvision.com



Requirements:

400 MHz CPU (700 MHz recommended), Windows 98/ME/2000/XP, 64 MB RAM (128 MB recommended), 650 MB free hard disk space, 32 MB VRAM 3D AGP accelerated video card with OpenGL and Direct 8, DirectX compatible soundcard

MERRY X'MAS

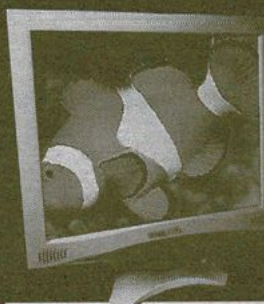
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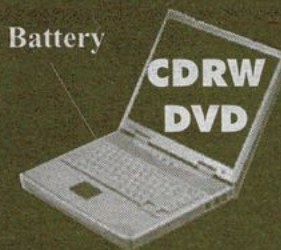
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Combat Flight Simulator 3: Battle for Europe soars

By NESTOR GULA

I first saw this game at the Electronic Entertainment Expo (E3) in Los Angeles last May. I was most impressed by the graphics and the gameplay of the demo Microsoft was showing. I was even more impressed with the booth that the company was using to show off the game; it was the fuselage of a Second World War era aircraft and was very impressive. But back to the game.

Combat Flight Simulator 3: Battle for Europe (CFS3) is an extension and enhancement of the previous version, which concentrated on the air war in the Pacific. As with the original *Combat Flight Simulator*, the war has come back

to Europe. Unlike the original game, which took place over diverse areas and periods during the conflict in Europe, CFS3 focuses on three battles post D-Day — the breakout from the beachhead in Normandy, the battle for the Falaise gap and the Battle of the Bulge. This tighter game premise leads to more focused mission and campaign games within the game itself.

The stars of CFS3 are the graphics and the planes. The graphics are truly great. The planes are easy as a lark to fly, but once you start to press in for a kill, you can just imagine the skill the WW2 pilots must have possessed to survive and thrive in the air. What is truly great is that a wide assortment of varied

planes is available in the game. In total there are 34 variants of 18 different planes.

The planes are representative of the three major combatants: American, British and German. There are the ever-present fighters (like the Spitfire, Mustang, Messerschmitt Bf109 and Focke-Wulf Fw 190), but great credit has to go to the designers of CFS3 for the inclusion of less well known planes like the Typhoon, Tempest, P-47 Thunderbolt and P-38 Lightning. If flying single-engine planes doesn't turn your crank, then you can hop into a fighter-bomber like the wooden Mosquito or a selection of medium bombers like the B-26, B-25 or the Ju 88. You can even fly the German jet, the first jet plane in production, the Me 262.

CFS3 has a what-if section that irritated me at

first. It includes aircraft that were either in the planning stages or in pre-production mode when the war finished, and they never saw combat. However, flying these, like the tail-less Gotha Go 229A, the twin-engine (one in front, one in the rear) Do-335A, the radical U.S. P-55 Ascender, or either of the British or American jets that never made it to the front, was fun. The game mode is called "What If," after all.

Borrowing a page from the stalwart *Flight Simulator*, CFS3 has a very methodical way of teaching the player how to fly and engage enemy units. There is no intrusive tutorial section. You can choose to learn to fly or you can just set your plane to invincible status, jump into a Quick Combat scenario, and blast away. ♦

more INFO

Combat Flight Simulator 3: Battle for Europe
\$69.99

Microsoft

www.microsoft.com/games/combatfs3

Requirements:

400 MHz CPU or higher, Windows 98/ME/2000/XP, 128 MB RAM, 900 MB hard disk space, 3D graphics card with 16 MB memory, soundcard, joystick or flight yoke



Strike Fighters looks to the '60s

By NESTOR GULA

Eschewing the normal subject of flight simulators, *Strike Fighters: Project 1* (SF) chose to focus on a period where the jet aircraft weren't just glamorous. The jet aircraft of the late 1950s and '60s were workhorses. They were fast, but they were also unreliable, ungainly, quite primitive and frequently not very manoeuvrable. Yet these aircraft had long life-spans, they served in many conflicts, and many are still in use today.

You get to fly four different aircraft in SF: F-100 Super Sabre, A-4 Skyhawk, F-104 Starfighter and F-4 Phantom. Right off the bat I thought to myself, "Too bad you can't fly any Soviet planes of that era." I guess that they will be included in the next series of this game — perhaps called Project 2. Although these planes featured prominently in the Vietnam conflict, the situation in SF occurs in a fictional Middle Eastern area, focusing on two

states that are in a conflict over oil fields. One country is a Soviet client state; the other one is backed by the United States.

Gameplay in SF is very straightforward. You can choose between Instant Action, Single Mission, or do a whole Campaign. There is also a multiplayer mode. Playing this game, you realize how difficult the first era of jet combat was. There are no radar lock-ons and everything moves very quickly. The game is challenging and entertaining. ♦

more INFO

Strike Fighters: Project 1
\$69.99

Strategy First

www.strategyfirst.com

Requirements:

400 MHz processor (650 MHz or higher recommended), Windows XP/ME/2000/98/95, 64 MB RAM (256 MB recommended), 500 MB hard disk space, DirectX 8.1 supported 3D graphic accelerator with 16 MB video memory (64 MB recommended), mouse, keyboard (joystick recommended)



Wired for play: Console gaming goes online

Marc Saltzman



Game On!

Once upon a time, indulging in a "multiplayer" video game meant squeezing beside a friend to share the same TV. Today, all three next-generation video game consoles are online. Players can now duke it out against one another from different parts of the world. However, the heavyweights in this competitive industry — Sony, Nintendo and Microsoft — each differ slightly in how their customers log in and play online.

TC! wanted to see how difficult it was to set up an account and engage in a multiplayer match for each system. Fortunately, the task proved straightforward and trouble-free for all three. Here are the details, along with how to set up an account, and a look at the top online game to consider per platform.

PlayStation 2

Sony Computer Entertainment of America recently introduced its Network Adapter, a \$70 plug-in module for the back of the PlayStation 2 (PS2). The device includes two jacks: One for dial-up modems (narrowband) and an Ethernet port for high-speed access (broadband).

Bear in mind, broadband solutions — such as digital subscriber lines (DSL) and cable modems — are highly recommended for a smoother performance. Depending on the game, high-speed connections may be mandatory, and users must have a memory card with at least 137 KB of free space to get online.

Setting up the PS2 for online play was a breeze. The installation CD (included with the Network Adapter) simply asks users to select an Internet Service Provider (ISP), or it can automatically detect a modem. I opted for the latter, and it recognized my cable modem right away. Some ISPs may require a login name, password and other information. It then tested the connection and confirmed the PS2 was online.

Starting a multiplayer game of *SOCOM: U.S. Navy SEALs* was as painless as setting up the network connection itself.

tion itself.

SOCOM (\$79.99; rated M for Mature) is Sony's first Internet-ready action thriller, allowing players to strap on the boots of an elite Navy SEAL operative and dismantle various terrorist infrastructures worldwide.

The *SOCOM* lobby is divided into geographical areas, so players can find someone local to play with (cooperatively or competitively). But take note: A broadband modem is required to play *SOCOM*.

Other online-ready games for the PlayStation 2 include Sony's *ATV Offroad Fury 2*, Activision's *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 4*, EA Sports' *Madden NFL 2003*, Sega Sports' *NFL 2K3* and Sony/989's *NFL Game Day 2003*.

Visit www.us.playstation.com for more information.

GameCube

As with the PS2, players have to purchase a modem to bring the GameCube online. But unlike the PS2, the narrowband and broadband modems are sold separately, at \$59.99 apiece.

The Nintendo Broadband Adapter or Modem Adapter snaps underneath the GameCube. There is no start-up CD, so players must set up their network configuration from within the individual games themselves. This was fairly easy to accomplish with Sega's *Phantasy Star Online Episode I & II* — the only GameCube title playable over the Internet to date.

Phantasy Star is also the first massively-multiplayer online role-playing game for consoles. Players set out on an epic fantasy adventure, meet allied characters and accomplish a number of quests. The game also features a "universal translation system," allowing players to chat in their native tongue through a couple hundred preprogrammed phrases. Supported languages are English, Spanish, Japanese, French and German.

In order to set up the Internet connection, I had to use the GameCube's thumb-stick as a mouse-like cursor, and it wasn't as intuitive as the straightforward PS2 experience. But after punching in the "hunter's license" for the game (and having a mandatory memory card to save the data), I was up and running in no time.

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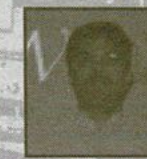
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Wired for play: Console gaming

continued from page 63

Phantasy Star Online Episode I & II (\$64.99; rated T for Teen) costs US\$8.95 a month to play online. Both modems will work with the game, and a single-player option is included, too. Visit www.sega.com for further details.

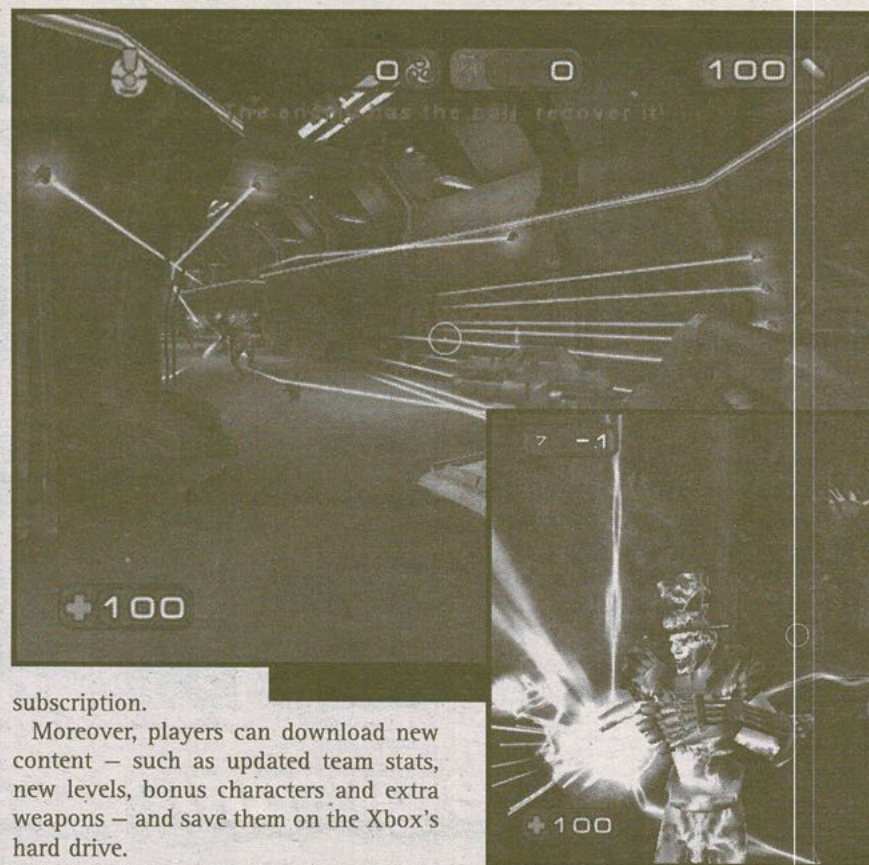
Xbox

Last month, Microsoft launched its highly-publicized multiplayer gaming service, dubbed Xbox Live.

Unlike the PS2 and GameCube, the Xbox has a built-in Ethernet port for high-speed Internet access. Therefore, no additional hardware must be purchased. There is also no support for dial-up connectivity.

The most noticeable difference between the Xbox Live and its competitors is its "unified service approach." This means all online games are under one service, with one unique identity per player, called a "gamer tag." Similar to instant messaging programs, Xbox Live features a buddy list to find friends logged onto the service.

Once a game commences, players can chat using the Xbox Communicator headset, which is included in the service's \$79.99 price tag for a one-year



subscription.

Moreover, players can download new content — such as updated team stats, new levels, bonus characters and extra weapons — and save them on the Xbox's hard drive.

Of the three online gaming services, setting up a new account on Xbox Live was the easiest. A serial number must be

entered to activate the subscription. It then recog-

nized my cable modem, and accepted my gamer tag choice of "gameguy." As with the other two machines, some users may be asked to input general ISP information just once.

Microsoft is betting on Infogrames' Canadian-made *Unreal Championship* (\$74.99; rated M for Mature) to be the killer app it needs to kick-start its Xbox Live service. The game is an intense 3D shooter that's played from a first-person perspective. More than two dozen players can duke it out in one of six game modes, through more than 30 attractive indoor and outdoor levels.

Other Xbox Live-enabled games include:

Ubi Soft's *Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon* and *Raven Shield*; Sega Sports' *NFL 2K3*, *NBA 2K3* and *NHL 2K3*; and Microsoft's *MechAssault*, *NFL Fever 2003* and *Whacked!* For more information on Xbox Live, visit

www.xbox.com/live. ♦

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Send your entries to: Toronto Computes!, Digital Design Contest, 625 Church Street, Suite 600, Toronto, ON, M4Y 2G1 Attn: Editor

The Second World War comes to the Mac

By ANDREW MOORE-CRISPIN

WWII Online: Blitzkrieg, from Cornered Rat and Strategy First, offered PC gamers a virtual battlefield where they could change the course of history. Now it's the Mac user's turn.

WWII Online has no real offline single player game, only a "practice offline" mode, where players can walk around to get the feel of the game, try out the different vehicles offered and do some weapons practice.

The online game is subdivided into war rooms, each hosting 1,000 players at a time. To play, gamers must subscribe to Playnet.com (www.playnet.com), for US\$9.95 a month. A one-month trial comes included when buying the game for \$54.99. It should be noted that the PC version of **WWII Online** is already in the valueware category, and costs about US\$20.

The graphics and sound are great, if your computer has the resources to make use of them. The audio uses Doppler effects, so you don't have to wait to see your energy going down to know you're being shot at and from which direction.

The game offers gamers a wide variety of land, sea, and air vehicles.

Controlling vehicles in the game has a pretty steep learning curve, which I suppose adds to the realism. Once gamers get the hang of the vehicles, they work well and are fun to drive.

Players can climb the ranks and can eventually command an entire army, designing the goals and strategy by which the war is won or lost. Less avid gamers can remain as a grunt on the front lines or drive an armoured personnel carrier, boat, tank, etc.

These options give the game some depth, where if you're into strategy games, you can ascend the ranks to command an entire army, deciding where troops are placed and coordinating land, air and sea operations. If you like flight sims, you can take to the skies, and if you're into first person shooters, you can play out your tour of duty on the front lines, shooting anything that moves until it doesn't.

Game designers went to great lengths to make vehicles, scenery and weaponry as close to the real thing as possible. The included technical manual explains all in-game vehicles and weapons, including some interesting and potentially useful facts about each, from the rate of fire of a machine gun to the gear pattern

of an armoured personnel carrier.

To enjoy this game, players must dedicate a lot of time to learning the ins and outs of it, making it unattractive to casual gamers, but then again, anyone willing to shell out US\$9.95 a month to play probably isn't a casual gamer.

The persistent environment means that the game is happening, whether you're there or not, so miss a few days and you, or indeed the war, might be lost when you come back. Game designers were going for realism, and did a pretty good job of it (not that most of us have any real basis for comparison).

Emphasis is on teamwork, à la real army. If you go off Rambo style, you'll quickly run out of ammo and get fragged; likewise, if you plan to crash a tank through enemy lines on your own, there's a good chance you won't be coming back.

Game designers didn't make the game so realistic as to give players only one life though — players can respawn at the mission start point as many times as necessary, and before players get the hang of the game, this is very necessary.

When gamers log on to their side (Axis or Allies), an overview of the cur-

rent missions is displayed, allowing players to customize their experience.

Gamers can also request a "crew" to take into battle; an example of where a crew can come in handy is in operating tanks, some of which need a four-person crew (commander, driver/hull gunner, turret gunner and radio operator).

The option for gamers to climb the military ranks, and the large offering of weapons and vehicles, mean that as gamers become tired of one dimension of the game, they can move on to command ground troops, pilot an airplane or captain a ship, for example.

If you're into MMO games and don't mind shelling out the US\$9.95 a month, **WWII Online** is a good title, especially given the scant game offerings for Mac users. ♦

more INFO

WWII Online
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Strategy First
www.strategyfirst.com

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Sharlene Myers

At Play



Ah, Paris. In the 1920s, no less – one of the city's most glorious and glamorous eras. Picasso, Stravinsky, Hemingway and Joyce all spent part of the decade there.

Well, I haven't run into them yet, and somehow, I don't think I will. Maybe I'm in the wrong café?

Post Mortem focuses on the seamy side of Parisian society. It starts out dark and creepy, with a gruesome double murder, and as I get further into the mystery, it seems to be getting darker and creepier. Nearly everyone seems to be lying, and I'm not sure who can be trusted.

The central character, Gus Macpherson, is an American detective who has moved to Paris to paint. When a beautiful and apparently wealthy woman approaches him for help in finding her sister's murderer, he reluctantly agrees to take the case. It seems painting isn't paying the bills.

She's paying by the day, which sounds

If life was like a game ...

good, but we've been all over the city and talked to at least a dozen people, and only one day seems to have passed in the storyline. You'd think travel time would eat up some hours, but it's only a matter of clicking on a map and I'm there. While it doesn't bode well for Gus's chances of saving enough money to feed his art habit, it's a nifty trick I wouldn't mind transferring to the real world.

Come to think of it, there are a few other adventure game tricks that could come in handy in real life. For example, in the game, I always know if I might need something later by whether I can actually pick it up. If I'm not going to need an object, it just stays where it is. Considering the weight of my shoulder bag on any given day, that type of editing ability could save my back. Plus I could get advance notice of rain, just by reaching for my umbrella.

This even works with completely unfamiliar objects in rooms belonging to others, and with things hidden in drawers. So if, for example, I was to wander through the office across the hall, I could presumably find out where my co-worker keeps her chocolate stash without having to rifle through her whole desk. Not

that I would do that. I wouldn't. Honest.

On the other hand, no matter how many things I need or pick up in the game, they all fit into my bag or my pockets, regardless of how many things I'm already carrying or their relative size. I know several mothers of small children who would probably pay serious cash to learn this trick – it might be even more lucrative than the sideline detective work.

Over the holidays, many of us find ourselves in rooms full of strangers, self-consciously trying to make conversation. When Gus starts off a conversation with someone, cue cards magically appear supplying us with pre-researched questions to ask each character, based on what information they may have for us. Where it might be helpful or necessary to lie to get the information we need, the card writer has often supplied a couple of stories to choose from, so we don't have to fumble around on the spot and look guilty.

Wouldn't it be easier if we had cue cards to help us kick things off, researched by someone who understands what questions we should ask each person and what information they might want to share with us?

Post Mortem is less linear than most adventure games, and so any given conversation can take different turns and lead to different results. Ever find yourself saying the wrong thing and wishing you could press rewind? Well, here, if you save your game before you start talking, you could go back to start it over if you don't like where it goes. This works for actions, as well. Faced with two options at one point, I actually played both for a while, switching between them until one came up better. That could have been a useful tool for choosing a university major.

The only trouble is that soon I had so many saved games that it was hard to keep them all straight and figure out which was the one I wanted to finish. So, having chosen a major, I would need to figure out which life to wake up in the next morning. And then how long would it take before I had another decision to make and had to go through the process all over again?

Considering how long a day is, maybe it would be best just to decide and not look back. We're paid by the day, after all, and there's so much more to Paris than this. ♦

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Profile: Daniel Quintas

These days, it's more about style than silicon. That explains why Daniel Quintas' popular Bloor St. West hang-out, Insomnia, has slowly moved away from its roots as an Internet café to a place with the artful suffix "Restaurant Bar. Lounge." Now 30, he was a mere babe when he launched Insomnia Internet Bar Café in 1997 out of his love of online gaming. But times change: "A lot of other [Internet cafés] started opening up around here and because we are on a main floor, our rent's a lot more," explains Quintas. "When we first got all our computers they were about \$6,000 each and now you can get them for about \$1,000. And we had an Internet connection, a T1, which was \$1,400 a month and now you can get ADSL for a hundred and something a month-so ..." You can guess the rest. Today, the very funkily attired Insomnia serves food and drink, has a DJ spinning nightly and, if you're in the mood, you can sit down with a Tarot card reader. Says the self-described techie turned restaurateur: "I'm enjoying it. It's a lot of work but it's a lot of fun."

Who: Daniel Quintas, owner, Insomnia Restaurant Bar. Lounge (563 Bloor St. W.).

Computer now used: P4 2.8 GHz Dell Precision workstation, 1 GB RAM, 120 GB hard drive, 20-inch flatscreen monitor.

Computer first used: Commodore 64C.

Favourite computer: Commodore 64; "It was so simple, it was just good – such a sturdy machine."

Other technical gadgetry in use at this time: Palm handheld, Nokia phone; "I use 'em all. I was playing with that new notebook computer where you can write on the screen [with a stylus]. My roommate has one."

Do you use your computer for play? "The last game I tried out was *Age of Mythology*. It's great! It just reminds me of *Red Alert* from a long time ago. I used to be a really big player."

Best thing about the technology you

have: "It just makes things simpler, especially for organizing. If I need to look up a phone number, pay my bills ... I do everything online."

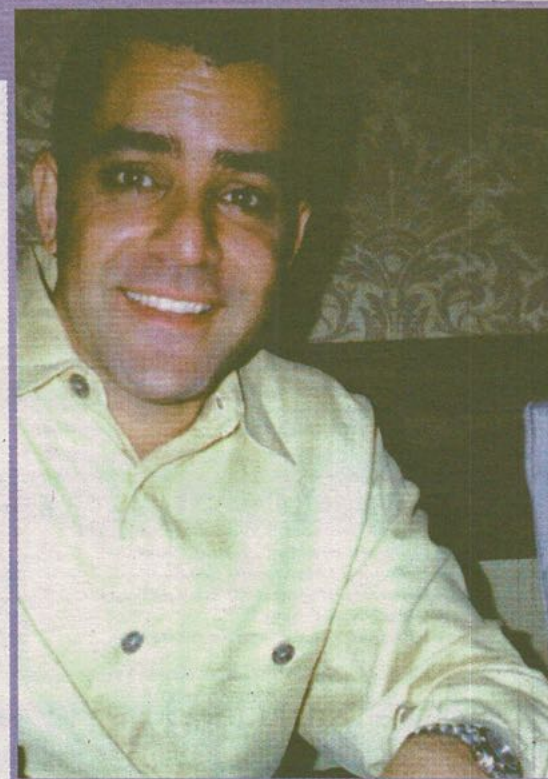
Worst thing: "Privacy. I mean, we have to pay a price."

What can't you live without: "My computer – it has all my information."

Is there anything you think you need? "Not really. If I need it I just get it – the restaurant's doing well."

What frustrates you the most about technology? "When it goes down. It doesn't happen a lot but you definitely feel it when it does. But it doesn't go down nearly as much as it used to."

Personal take on issues dealing with technology: "In North America it's always been too fast – Toronto especially. Like, Vancouver is slower. Society



here is always work, work, work. Sixty hours a week is nothing for me, but it's something you get used to." ♦

- Samson Okalow

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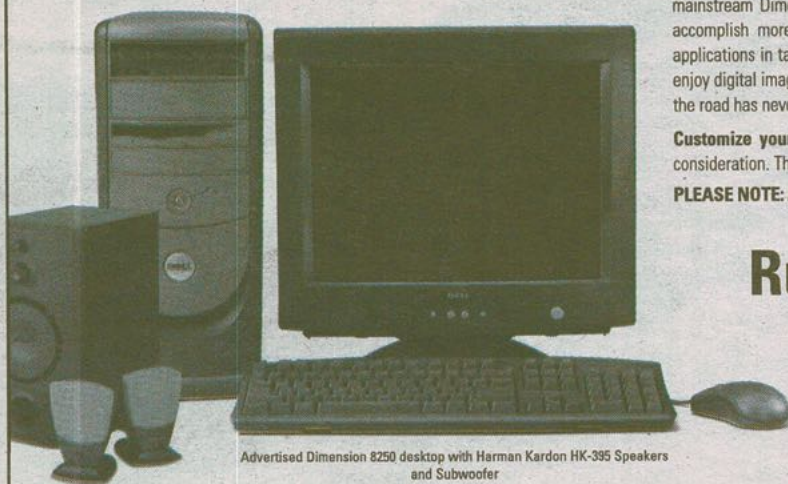
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